Sofie Remijsen

GREEK CULTURE IN THE ROMAN WORLD

The End of Greek Athletics in Late Antiquity

THE END OF GREEK ATHLETICS IN LATE ANTIQUITY

This book presents the first comprehensive study of how and why athletic contests, a characteristic aspect of Greek culture for over a millennium, disappeared in late antiquity. In contrast to previous discussions, which focus on the ancient Olympics, the end of the most famous games is analyzed here in the context of the collapse of the entire international agonistic circuit, which encompassed several hundred contests. The first part of the book describes this collapse by means of a detailed analysis of the fourth- and fifth-century history of the athletic games in each region of the Mediterranean: Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, Italy, Gaul, and northern Africa. The second half continues by explaining these developments, challenging traditional theories (especially the ban by the Christian emperor Theodosius I), and discussing in detail both the late-antique socio-economic context and the late-antique perceptions of athletics.

SOFIE REMIJSEN is Junior Professor in the Department of History at the University of Mannheim.

GREEK CULTURE IN THE ROMAN WORLD

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SOFIE REMIJSEN

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Even after the Emperor Theodosius' edict suppressing the antique Olympiads had broken the thread of athletic tradition, there remained here and there modest gymnasia where obstinate amateurs lingered; but they were no longer lit by the gleams of artistic beauty and intellectual efforts, for mind had become divorced from muscle. This obscure epoch deserves research. I should have liked to lead the way myself; I shall not be able, and hope that others may share this ambition. Who knows whether such research might not help us better to grasp the character and scope of those outbursts of energy of which the Greek empire time and again provides a fascinating and mysterious spectacle throughout the thousand years of its stormy history?

Baron Pierre de Coubertin on February 24, 1918

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Acknowledgements

Occasionally, people ask me whether I like sports. As I have been studying Greek athletics since the summer of 2006, they often react with surprise when I admit that, outside of academia, I'm not such a sporty person. At the start of this book, therefore, I would like to thank the person who brought me in touch with this, for me unlikely, topic: Willy Clarysse, an extremely enthusiastic papyrologist and occasional critic of sports devotees. After he hired me to make a website on Greek athletics in cooperation with his Chinese colleagues in Beijing, I discovered that athletics can also offer a fascinating perspective on society and culture at large, and hope that the readers of this book will too.

This monograph represents a revised version of a Ph.D. thesis written 2008–11 at the University of Leuven, with the help of a scholarship from the Research Foundation of Flanders, and under the supervision of Willy Clarysse. I greatly appreciated the intellectual, practical, and social support of a fantastic team of colleagues at the Leuven ancient history department. Some of the earliest research for this Ph.D. happened during a research stay at the University of Cincinnati, made possible by Peter van Minnen, and made easy by local support from Andrew Connor. In 2010, several chapters were written at the Kommission für Alte Geschichte und Epigraphik in Munich, a visit made possible by Christof Schuler, Rudolf Haensch, and the Jacobi Stiftung. Earlier versions of some chapters have been published as separate articles after being presented at conferences in Bloomington, Vienna, Exeter, and Nijmegen (Remijsen 2012, 2014, 2015a, and 2015b in the bibliography), and thus profited from the feedback of various respondents. Additionally, my research was aided by the kindness of several scholars who gave me access to their unpublished work, especially Ine Jacobs, Johannes Hahn, Alexander Puk, Jean–Yves Strasser, and likewise Nick Gonis and Dominic Rathbone, who gave me early access to the papyri on sport published in *P. Oxy*. LXXIX.

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Abbreviations

AE	*L'Année Épigraphique*
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
I.Hierapolis	*Altertümer von Hierapolis*, by C. Humann *e.a.*, Berlin, 1898.
BCH	*Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*
BGU	See P.
BL	*Berichtigungsliste der Griechischen Papyrusurkunden aus Ägypten*, Leiden, 1922–.
CC SL	*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, Turnhout, 1953.
CIG	*Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, Berlin, 1828–1877.
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin, 1863.
CPR	See P.
CRAI	*Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles–Lettres*
DNP	*Der neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*, ed. H. Cancik, H. Schneider, and M. Landfester, Stuttgart, 1996–2003.
FD III	*Fouilles de Delphes: III. Épigraphie*. Paris, 1929–.
FGrH	*Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, by F. Jacoby *e.a.*, Leiden, 1923–.
HSCP	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
IAG	*Iscrizioni agonistiche greche*, by L. Moretti, Rome, 1953.
IAph2007	*Inscriptions of Aphrodisias*, by J. Reynolds, C. Roueché, and G. Bodard, 2007: http://insaph/kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007.
IC	*Inscriptiones Creticae*, by M. Guarducci, Rome, 1935–1950.
I.Corinth	*Corinth VIII*, by J. H. Kent, Princeton, N.J., 1931–1966.

I.Cos	*Iscrizioni di Cos*, by M. Segre, Rome, 1993–2007.
I.Didyma	*Didyma: II. Die Inschriften*, by A. Rehm, Berlin, 1958.
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae*, Berlin, 1877–.
IGLS	*Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, Paris, 1929–.
IGR	*Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes*, by R. Cagnat *e.a.*, Paris, 1911–1927.
IGUR	*Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae*, by L. Moretti, Rome, 1968–1990.
IJHS	*International Journal of the History of Sport*
IJO	*Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*, by W. Ameling, Tübingen, 2004.
IK	*Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien*, Bonn, 1972–.
I.Kition	*Kition dans les textes: Testimonia littéraires et épigraphiques et corpus des inscriptions*, by M. Yon *e. a.*, Paris, 2004.
ILAfr	*Inscriptions latines d'Afrique: Tripolitaine, Tunisie, Maroc*, by R. Cagnat, A. Merlin, and L. Chatelain, Paris, 1923.
ILAlg	*Inscriptions latines de l'Algérie*, by S. Gsell and E. Albertini *e.a.*, Paris, 1922–1976.
ILCV	*Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres*, by E. Diehl, Berlin, 1924–1967.
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, by H. Dessau, Berlin, 1892–1916.
IM	*Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Istanbuler Abteilung*
I.Memnonion	*Les graffites grecs du Memnonion d'Abydos*, by P. Perdrizet and G. Lefebvre, Nancy, Paris, and Strasbourg, 1919.
I.Métr.Ég.	*Inscriptions métriques de l'Égypte gréco-romaine*, by É. Bernand, Paris, 1969.
I.Napoli	*Iscrizioni greche d'Italia: Napoli*, by E. Miranda, Rome, 1990–1995.
I.Porto	*Iscrizioni greche d'Italia: Porto*, by G. Sacco, Rome, 1984.
IvM	*Die Inschriften von Magnesia am Maeander*, by O. Kern, Berlin, 1900.
IvMilet	*Inschriften von Milet (Milet. Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen seit dem Jahre*

	1899 6), by A. Rehm, W. Günther, and P. Herrmann, Berlin, 1997–2006.
IvO	*Die Inschriften von Olympia (Olympia. Die Ergebnisse der von dem deutschen Reich veranstalteten Ausgrabung 5)*, by W. Dittenberger and K. Purgold, Berlin, 1896.
IvP	*Die Inschriften von Pergamon (Altertümer von Pergamon 8)*, by M. Fränkel, Berlin, 1890–1895.
JÖAI	*Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes*
JRA	*Journal of Roman Archaeology*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
LSJ	*A Greek–English Lexicon: Revised and Augmented Throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones with the Assistance of Roderick McKenzie*, by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, Oxford, 1940.
MAMA	*Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua*, Manchester and London, 1928.
M.Chr.	See P.
O.	See P.
OF	*Olympische Forschungen*, Berlin, 1944–.
OMS	*Opera Minora Selecta*, by L. Robert, Amsterdam, 1969–1990.
OGIS	*Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*, by W. Dittenberger, Leipzig, 1903–1905.
P. . . . /Pap.	All abbreviations referring to editions of papyri or ostraca can be found in the online *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*: http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/papyrus/texts/clist_papyri.html.
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*, by J. P. Migne *e.a.*, Paris, 1857–1866.
PIR^2	*Prosopographia Imperii Romani. Saec. I, II, III*, 2nd edn., Berlin, 1933–.
PLRE	*The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, by J. R. Martindale, A. H. M. Jones, and J. Morris, Cambridge, 1971–1992.
PO	*Patrologia Orientalis*, Paris, 1904–.
PSI	See P.
RE	*Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. A. Pauly, G. Wissowa *e. a.*, Stuttgart, 1894–1980.

RM	*Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung*
Sardis VII	*Sardis: VII. Greek and Latin Inscriptions*, by W. H. Buckler and D. M. Robinson, Leiden, 1932.
SB	See P.
SC	*Sources chrétiennes*, Paris, 1942–.
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, Leiden and Amsterdam, 1923–.
SPP	See P.
Steinepigramme	*Steinepigramme aus dem griechischen Osten*, by R. Merkelbach and J. Stauber, Stuttgart, 1998–2004.
St.Pont. III	*Studia Pontica III. Recueil des inscriptions grecques et latines du Pont et de l'Arménie*, by J. G. C. Anderson, F. Cumont, and H. Grégoire, Brussels, 1910.
Suppl.Epi.Rodio	"Supplemento epigrafico rodio," by G. Pugliese Carratelli, *Annuario della scuola archeologica di Atene e delle missioni italiane in Oriente*, 30–32, 1952–1954: 247–316.
Syll.^{3}	*Sylloge inscriptionum graecarum*, 3rd edn., by W. Dittenberger, Leipzig, 1915–1924.
TAM	*Tituli Asiae Minoris*, Vienna, 1901–.
TAPA	*Transactions of the American Philological Association*
TLG	*Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*: www.tlg.uci.edu/.
W.Chr.	See P.
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

Introduction

The end of a success story

Around AD 250 athletics was a significant part of civic life from southern Gaul and northern Africa to Syria and Egypt. Within this broad area, exercising in the gymnasium was a beloved pastime among those members of ancient society who could afford to be (occasionally) at leisure. Hundreds of *agones*, contests for athletes and/or performing artists, were organized by almost as many cities. Though some of these competitions could look back on centuries-old traditions, most had been founded only a century or even a few decades before, as part of a phenomenon described by Louis Robert as the "agonistic explosion" of the imperial age.[1] By about AD 350 most of these hundreds of games are no longer documented and by about 450 only one *agon* seems to have remained, the Olympics of Antioch. The agonistic explosion of the imperial period was, in other words, followed by an equally noteworthy implosion in late antiquity.

This rather dramatic change across the Mediterranean has never been studied comprehensively. Not only has it been insufficiently examined why these games disappeared, but no one has even attempted to chart this evolution chronologically and geographically. Thus far, discussion has focused solely on the fate of a handful of famous games. Yet the end of Greek athletics cannot be identified with the end of one symbolic contest. Therefore, this book will not be about the end of the ancient Olympics, nor about the end of any other individual contest, but about the end of competitive athletics as a whole. Together, the hundreds of contests across the Mediterranean formed one big circuit. All contests had their own spot on a four-year calendar, so the thousands of competitors knew where to go at each time of the year. They traveled from one contest to the other, from province to province. To attract the real champions, contests depended at

[1] Robert 1984: 38.

least as much on the success of neighboring games as on their own reputation. If we want to understand how this all fell apart, we need to understand first how this intricate system once had functioned and supported agonistic growth.

Coubertin's incentive quoted above as the epigraph to this book left no impact in scholarly circles.[2] The neglect of the final phase of Greek athletics is to a certain extent surprising, as the disappearance of competitive athletics has considerable symbolic value. In around 200 in Edessa, just outside the Roman Empire, Bardesan characterized all peoples by their most striking habit. The Greeks were those who practiced athletics.[3] Athletics was indeed one of those strikingly typical practices that set their culture apart from other cultures. The demise of the athletic contests can thus be considered symptomatic as well as symbolic of the end of ancient Greek culture in general. As Kaldellis has discussed in a monograph in this same series, Christian faith and adherence to the Roman Empire became in the fourth century AD the dominant elements in the constructed identity of the population of the eastern Mediterranean; for those who wanted to identify themselves as Greek only literary *paideia* remained available as a potential marker, since the increasingly harsh attitude to paganism and the centralization of the Empire made the religious and political interpretations of Greekness problematic.[4] To the importance of literary *paideia* one could add that at the start of the fourth century physical *paideia* too was still available as an alternative marker, but a century later it was on the verge of disappearing. This book is not, however, about why people stopped using athletics to construct a specific Greek identity. A process of identity construction involves interpreting the world and the practices in which one engages;[5] what is no longer engaged in can of course not be categorized as marking a specific ethnic or religious identity. Instead, this book is about why the practice of competitive athletics disappeared in late antiquity, which represents a small, but by no means unimportant, chapter in the greater story of the end of antiquity. It is entitled "The end of *Greek* athletics" only to distinguish the specific set of competitive sports practiced at the *agones* from other athletic traditions in the ancient world.

[2] Coubertin 2000: 271. The passage comes from a speech given at the Greek Liberal Club at Lausanne, and was originally published in French under the title "Ce que nous pouvons maintenant demander au Sport . . . ".

[3] Bardesanes Edessenus, *The Book of the Laws of Countries* 599 (ed. Drijvers 1964: 53).

[4] Kaldellis 2007: 1–187 (central thesis of part one), esp. 2–6.

[5] This interpretation of 'identity' is based on Brubaker 2004: 1–63.

Despite the symbolic value of the end of Greek athletics, the apparent absence of real interest in the topic is not entirely unexpected. That a custom popular for more than a millennium eventually came to an end implies decline, and decline is not likely to inspire enthusiasm. "To see how a blossoming tree dies slowly, how one branch after the other is cut off, that is not a happy sight."[6] With these words, Boetticher, who in 1883 wrote the first monograph on Olympia after the excavation of the site, deplored that as a professional academic he was obliged to add at least a small chapter about the postclassical period. Until well into the twentieth century, many scholars similarly thought of decline as a sad and ugly topic. Afterwards, it simply became unfashionable. What constitutes 'decline', however? Are there any objective criteria we can use to determine when athletic contests stopped flourishing and started to deteriorate? Before coming to our own definition of decline, this introduction aims to analyze how previous studies touching on the end of athletics have all started from their own, usually unconscious, preconceptions.

The traditional approach: a normative definition of decline

The first academic studies of Greek athletics appeared in the nineteenth century.[7] The popularity of contemporary sports, especially in Germany ('Turnen') and England ('amateur athletics'), were a major factor in this development. Sources used by the pioneers of the field were, besides a few statues, mainly literary texts, such as the victory odes of Pindar or Pausanias' books 5 and 6. These works of art and literature, however, are not equally informative about all games and periods, and therefore steered the field in a distinct direction. Most relevant texts either date from or discuss the archaic or classical periods (due to the Byzantine classicizing taste) and focus on the most prestigious contests, in particular on the Olympics. The study of athletics became, therefore, the study of the Olympic games and athletes, and of the three other famous games, in the archaic and classical periods.

The classical panhellenic sanctuaries were thus among the first ancient sites to be excavated in the late nineteenth century. In 1875 a German team

[6] Boetticher 1883: 385: " . . . die Jahrhunderte des Verfalles, welche der Mann der Wissenschaft zum Gegenstande seiner Forschung zu machen verpflichtet ist – dem blossen Liebhaber des Alterthums vermögen sie keine Neigung abzugewinnen; zu sehen, wie der einst blühende Baum langsam hinstirbt, wie ihm ein Ast nach dem anderen abgehauen wird, das ist kein erfreulicher Anblick."

[7] The first scholar to devote himself intensively to Greek athletics was Johann Heinrich Krause, who wrote four monographs on the topic: *Theagenes* (1835), *Olympia* (1838), *Die Gymnastik und Agonistik der Hellenen* (1840), and *Die Pythien, Nemeen und Isthmien* (1841).

around Ernst Curtius and Friedrich Adler started digging at Olympia. Between 1890 and 1897 the findings were meticulously published in five large volumes about the history, buildings, sculptures, bronzes and small finds, and inscriptions of the site. Throughout the twentieth century, excavations continued, with particular attention to the earliest stages of the sanctuary.[8] This detailed knowledge of the site only strengthened the central position of the Olympics in scholarship. In Delphi too excavations started in 1893.

During these excavation projects many Roman materials were brought to light. Even Boetticher admitted that the finds from the Roman age, both small objects and full-size statues, were numerous and of high quality. Nevertheless, political motives continued to stimulate a narrow focus on the archaic and classical period, after which decline was believed to have set in. Boetticher describes the period up to the Macedonian hegemony as the "hellenistische Zeit," that is the 'Greek period' in the sense of 'the period in which the Greek *poleis* were independent'. This term reflects nineteenth-century nationalism: as long as the Greeks were independent and experienced a sense of panhellenism, their culture was flourishing. A recurring notion, particularly in German studies on Greek athletics (Krause, Boetticher, Curtius) is that Greek 'national feeling' disappeared after the Persian war and that the later foreign occupation of Greece caused estrangement and a loss of healthy *Volkskraft*.[9]

The other major criterion applied by these studies in defining the sixth and fifth century as the golden age of Greek athletics was artistic. The early scholars referred in particular to the quality of the works of Pindar and Pheidias. This appraisal of the arts of the fifth and fourth centuries as the artistic norm was not a completely modern interpretation, but reflects norms derived from imperial-age texts.[10] In the early twentieth century 'classical' came into use as a term for the stage of the highest artistic development and therefore as a periodizing term for Greek history as well. Both 'Greek period' and 'classical period' imply a prescriptive definition of bloom and decline: some works of art, customs, political institutions, etc. were considered good, others bad. The norms regarding what was good and what was bad may have been perceived as timeless, but in reality they were determined by the contemporary values of the scholar. This was of course not exclusive to

[8] Finds were published in the series *Berichte über die Ausgrabungen in Olympia* and *Olympische Forschungen*.

[9] Weiler 1985–1986: 236–38, 256.

[10] Cf. P. Riemer, 'Klassizismus' in DNP 6 (1999): 493–94 and U. Walter, 'Periodisierung' in DNP 9 (2000): 576–82.

research on athletics. The model of emergence, golden age, and decline was a common paradigm for the interpretation of history. In the early twentieth century, authors such as Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee developed it as a theoretical framework for understanding cultures.

An additional argument for defining a golden age, specific to research on athletics, appeared in the English scholarship of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Mahaffy, Manning, Gardiner): that the sixth and fifth centuries were the 'age of the amateur', whereas after circa 400 BC began the 'age of the professional'. The honorable gentlemen of before were replaced by mindless, corrupt, and overtrained athletes competing for profit. This ideal of the perfect Greek athlete practicing 'sport for sport's sake' was first presented in 1879 by John Pentland Mahaffy, later editor of the Petrie papyri, who became interested in the matter during the 1875 Greek Olympic games in Athens. This Irish classical scholar idolized the English upper class and, therefore, his interpretation of Greek athletics was inspired by the refusal of nineteenth-century English gentlemen to compete with lower-class individuals.[11] From England, the idea of 'amateurism' – that is, a ban on competitors who earned money with their sport – spread to the rest of the Western world. In 1894, Pierre de Coubertin even used a discussion on amateurism as a pretext to lure people to his conference on instituting international modern Olympic games.[12]

The appeal of the modern Olympic games further stimulated scholarly interest in Greek athletics. Until the last quarter of the century most new works remained focused on the archaic and classical period and on Olympia.[13] At the same time, however, stadia and agonistic inscriptions, mostly postclassical, were discovered across the Mediterranean and these stimulated a very slow broadening of the field, in particular because of the efforts of Louis Robert and Luigi Moretti. From the 1920s to the 1980s, Robert devoted innumerable studies to epigraphic material from across the Greek world, often with reference to literary, papyrological, or numismatic parallels. There are few aspects of agonistic life he has not commented on with admirable insight. Moretti provided a ready collection of epigraphic evidence for further research, in 1953 by selecting and commenting on

[11] Weiler 1985–1986: 238–41; Young 1988: esp. 63–64. Kyle 1990 discusses the contemporary context of Gardiner's idealized view of Greek athletics, including notions of decline.

[12] Coubertin admitted this strategy in his memoirs, first published in 1932. See Coubertin 1989: 8; 2000: 315–16.

[13] E.g. Gardiner 1925, 1930, Jüthner 1965–1968 (written before his death in 1945), Drees 1962, 1967, Schöbel 1964, Harris 1972, Herrmann 1972, Hönle 1972, Mallwitz 1972 (a strong German interest coinciding with the Munich Olympics), Finley and Pleket 1976, Ebert 1980. Klee 1918 is rather exceptional in its early attention to inscriptions and Hellenistic festivals.

ninety agonistic inscriptions, of which sixty illustrated the Hellenistic and imperial period, and in 1957 by complementing Eusebius' list of Olympic *stadion* victors – at the time still attributed to Africanus – with all known victors from inscriptions and ancient literature.[14]

The idea that ancient sport was specialized and corrupted, and hence in decline from the fourth century BC on, was nevertheless still often taken for granted. Greek athletics was supposed to have developed quickly from the eighth century on, reached a golden age in the sixth and fifth centuries, and then declined for about 800 years before coming to its end. The Herulians, earthquakes, the rise of Christianity, and an edict by Theodosius I (or occasionally II) were named as immediate causes of this eventual end.[15] The rule that modern Olympic athletes needed to be amateurs persisted until the 1980s, and through this modern institution, the nineteenth-century ideal continued to influence twentieth-century scholarship.

In the later twentieth century, however, the spread of postmodernist thought to diverse academic fields stimulated a greater sensitivity to the anachronistic character of normative criteria. In 1984 David Young convincingly exposed what he called "the Olympic myth of the Greek amateur athlete" as a nineteenth-century invention.[16] In 1985, Weiler pointed out the influence of other modern ideals, such as nationalism and Marxism, on the development of *Pseudofaktoren* for the end of the Olympics. As a result, athletics was no longer considered to have declined for 800 years after a relatively short golden age, but to have remained popular for many centuries.

A paradigm shift

The traditional preference for the 'classical' periods and for the paradigm of emergence, golden age, and lamentable decline slowed down the development of late antiquity as a field within history. Though the term 'late antiquity' dates from the early twentieth century – coined in 1901 by the art historian Alois Riegl – as a field late antiquity is barely half a century old. That currently it is a thriving separate field is connected to the 'cultural turn' in history research, particularly since the 1970s. Under the influence of cultural anthropology, social and cultural aspects and mentality became

[14] Moretti 1953 is commonly abbreviated as IAG. Moretti 1957 was supplemented in 1970 and 1992. Eusebius' victor list has received a new edition in Christesen and Martirosova-Torlone 2006. They follow the view that Eusebius took over the list from Cassius Longinus.

[15] Weiler 1985–1986: 241–61.

[16] Pleket 1974, on the social status of athletes, had already offered a more nuanced picture than the traditional dichotomy of wealthy amateurs versus poor professionals.

preferred subjects of research. While political and institutional topics are more closely related to the dissolving Empire, themes such as asceticism, religiosity, gender, or education can be analyzed more easily from the perspective of change instead of decline and fall. The traditional and rather prejudiced image of weakness and decadence, connected to the paradigm of emergence, golden age, and decline of cultures, has now indeed been replaced by a paradigm of transformation and creative adaptation.[17]

Scholarship on late-antique spectacles more or less follows the above evolution. Although some interest in the topic already existed among church historians of the early twentieth century, most studies date from the 1970s on, when aspects of culture became the center of attention.[18] Several standard books date from this period, for example Werner Weismann's study of the early Christian reaction to games (1972) and the innovative studies on the circus by Alan Cameron (1973 and 1976). Several dissertations have further investigated the Christian problem (e.g. DeVoe 1987, Lugaresi 2008), or focused on games in specific regions (e.g. Hugoniot 1998). Ruth Webb has examined how classicizing late-antique texts deal with contemporary views of mime and pantomime (2008). The 2012 dissertation of Alexander Puk offers a more comprehensive picture on games in late antiquity.

These studies discuss Roman style games in detail, but barely touch upon Greek *agones*. Several papers from the last decades, however, attest that also among students of athletics has been sparked an interest in the late-antique period.[19] In 1985, Ingomar Weiler surveyed the previous explanations of the end of the Olympics and identified most explanations as *Pseudofaktoren* for decline. Influenced by the paradigm change he refused to speak further of 'decline' of the Olympic games: he put "Niedergang" between quotation marks and preferred non-normative terms such as 'change' and 'end'. Though critical of the perceived decline, in 1985 Weiler did not yet question the traditional explanation for the eventual end.[20] In 1991, Ulrich Sinn, excavator of Olympia, questioned the role of the Herulians and in 2003, Iole Fargnoli put the traditional reading

[17] A good overview of the development of 'late antiquity' as a separate field can be found in Rebenich 2009. For the cultural turn see also Martin 2005: 1–11. For the paradigm change see likewise Bowersock 1996.

[18] Eriau 1914 on the Christian condemnation of the theater. For a detailed *status quaestionis* of the Christian opinions on spectacles see Lugaresi 2008: 30–53.

[19] Besides the papers mentioned in the main text, more about the end of the Olympics can be found in Teja 1991, who just takes over (unfounded) traditional preconceptions and in Giatsis 1997, who is a bit more critical but very summary; a discussion of the *agones* in the reign of Diocletian is included in Wallner 2007.

[20] Weiler 1985–1986: esp. 261–63.

of the two Byzantine testimonies that supposedly attest imperial measures in a new light by studying their literary context. In 2004, Weiler went a step further and questioned the connection of these vague testimonies with precise imperial edicts. Around the same time, Gutsfeld and Lehmann carried out a research project on the last phases of the four traditional panhellenic sanctuaries and agonistic sites (Olympia, Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea).[21]

Although these recent contributions go along with the contemporary popularity of late antiquity, they still inherit from older research the focus on Olympia and the three other 'classical' sites, an exclusivity which is in fact not warranted by imperial-age reality. In 1988 Weiler took up anew the arguments he had developed in 1985, but this time applied them to the general "Krise" (again quotation marks) of athletics in the third century AD instead of only to the Olympics. While the 1985 article engaged mostly with more traditional scholarship, in 1988 he incorporated some new insights on the imperial period, indicating that even for the third century there are no certain signs of decline. Though he does not explicitly concede it, Weiler's approach leads him into an impasse: if one cannot discover decline, the end of the games is even more striking and in need of explanation. Weiler could not find a way out, as starting from previous studies he had no access to late-antique evidence from outside Olympia. Students of athletics typically avoid late antiquity, as the types of evidence they are used to working with are not available. Specialists on late antiquity, on the other hand, are usually unfamiliar with the technicalities of Greek athletics, which – as I have shown elsewhere – has led to misunderstandings regarding the best attested late-antique *agon*, the Olympics of Antioch.[22] There is indeed very little overlap between scholarship on imperial-age athletics and late-antique studies. Weiler thus lacked the necessary information for the crucial period. Charlotte Roueché has a better grasp of the late-antique material. In 1993 she described changes in the financial organization of games (Roman games as well as *agones*), which for her represented the essential factor for their survival or disappearance.[23] This is no doubt true for individual contests, but the financial arrangements alone do not explain why all *agones* disappeared while other types of games did not.

[21] Gutsfeld and Lehmann 2005, Gutsfeld, Hahn, and Lehmann 2007, Lehmann 2007a, and Lehmann 2007b offer preliminary results. Some of these are disputed by the excavators of the sites, particularly for Nemea. In 2013 they published the proceedings of a 2005 conference on spectacles in the Roman Empire, which was not limited to these four sites (Gutsfeld and Lehmann 2013a).

[22] Remijsen 2010a: 435–36.

[23] See also Roueché 2003–2004, a very brief but pertinent contribution.

Perhaps the most important reason for the relative unpopularity of the end of athletics as a subject is that it does not fit the modern idea that ancient culture did not 'fall', but 'transformed'. Weiler tried to apply the new paradigm, but his refusal to find decline led him to an impasse. *Agones* did fall: by the mid fifth century they were gone. At some point before, athletic contests had stopped being relevant for society and there is no reason to avoid the term 'decline' for this phase. 'Decline' is in this case not an outdated historiographical model that can be replaced by a model of 'transformation', but an accurate description. The question is then on the basis of which criteria this decline can be identified.

The epigraphic approach: a quantitative definition of decline

By the 1980s the availability of new evidence finally resulted in a new dynamic in the field of ancient athletics. The increased interest in the now abundant epigraphic and numismatic evidence drew greater attention to the Roman period.[24] In 1995, a colloquium in Münster was devoted to "Agonistik in der römischen Kaiserzeit".[25] Monographs started from the publication of exceptional new inscriptions or from a corpus of evidence that has never been studied as a whole, usually from a particular city or region, or took a more thematic approach.[26] A particularly popular theme in the last decade has been Greek identity in the imperial period.[27] The shift to the imperial period is also visible in the field of archaeology. Iconographic studies of coins and reliefs have improved the interpretation of agonistic images.[28] In 1987, Ulrich Sinn began the research project "Olympia während der römischen Kaiserzeit", which also covered late antiquity.[29]

[24] Orth 1998: 3.

[25] The proceedings were published in volume 24.1 of the sports journal *Stadion*: Lämmer 1998.

[26] E.g. Wörrle 1988 with a long inscription from Oenoanda on the institution of a contest. An excellent review of this book (and of Ziegler 1985) with a complete English translation of the inscription is Mitchell 1990. Petzl and Schwertheim 2006 published three letters from Hadrian with regulations for games, discovered at Alexandria Troas. Jones 2007 gives corrections to the edition and an English translation. See also Strasser 2010. Books on the basis of a corpus: e.g. Frisch 1986, commenting on agonistic papyri; Ziegler 1985, collecting all evidence of eastern Cilicia; Roueché 1993, on Aphrodisias; Caldelli 1993a, on the *Kapitolia* in Rome, and 1997, on the games in southern Gaul. Thematic approaches: e.g. as sport under the soldier emperors (Wallner 1997), the chronology of the *agones* (Strasser 2000), the association of performing artists (Le Guen 2001, Aneziri 2003), or the life of imperial-age athletes (Gouw 2009).

[27] E.g. van Nijf 1999, 2003, 2004, König 2005, Newby 2005.

[28] E.g. Rumscheid 2000 examining imperial-age depictions of crowns and garlands.

[29] Annual progress reports were published in *Nikephoros*: Sinn (*e.a.*) from 1992 to 1997.

With the publication of new agonistic inscriptions and coins in more accessible editions and with the increasing importance of databases and statistics in general, the high quantity of these sources and of the contests mentioned on them became more easily recognizable in the late twentieth century. The impact of Robert's opening speech at the 1982 epigraphy conference, where he for the first time explicitly drew the attention of all to what he described as the "agonistic explosion" of the imperial age, cannot be overestimated. For this idea of an agonistic explosion, quantity is the foremost criterion. As with qualitative criteria, however, in most cases the quantitative criterion is used implicitly or even unconsciously. This is sometimes dangerous, as all quantitative data on antiquity are heavily biased by the state of the evidence. Inscriptions, even though they seem well suited for a quantitative approach because of the role of chance in their preservation, are particularly problematic in this respect, as putting up inscriptions was not equally common in all centuries and places or for all purposes. What and why people inscribed changed considerably in the course of antiquity. Ramsay MacMullen coined the term 'epigraphic habit' for these evolutions and pointed out how this habit has affected modern ideas of bloom and decline.[30] Similarly, the numismatic habit can be misleading as well.[31]

Andrew Farrington explicitly tried to trace evolutions in the popularity of the Olympic games with a quantitative method, namely by examining the chronological distribution of the known Olympic victors (on the basis of Moretti's list). In 1997, he calculated that no fewer than a fifth, or even a fourth, of all Olympic victors are known, enough to be representative for the whole. On the basis of his quantitative study he concludes that interest in Olympia as an agonistic center declined in the later Hellenistic period, rose again in the first century AD, and began to decline again in the second. However, his idea that the number of known victors, that is victors who were both recorded and preserved, is indicative of the contemporary popularity of athletics is essentially flawed. The actual number of Olympic victors was stable: in every Olympiad there were as many victors as there were events.[32] How many of them were recorded indeed depended

[30] MacMullen 1982: esp. 244–46.

[31] Nollé 2012: 16 argues that the number of imperial-age coins may exaggerate the agonistic explosion.

[32] Minor variations are of course possible, as some athletes won more than one event. Only if certain events were added or abandoned the number would change, but from the mid-Hellenistic period on the program seems to have been stable. Eusebius' list of *stadion* victors mentions that the equestrian events were reinstituted in AD 17, after having been absent for a long time, but Crowther 1995: 112–17 has shown that this statement is incorrect. Even if they were discontinued, this did not last for more than four Olympiads.

on the popularity of the Olympics, but also on the popularity of different ways of recording, which in turn depended on taste and economic factors. How many of these recorded victors were then preserved depended on natural causes and the perception of this period in later times. Survival of inscriptions also depended on reuse of the material (e.g. the melting of bronze). Because of the classicizing tradition of their time, Pausanias or Philostratus mostly recorded archaic and classical victors. Likewise because of this classicizing tradition, these authors were appreciated and copied in later times. Farrington is aware of the limitations of his evidence and presents them, in particular the problem of the epigraphic habit, in a nuanced way, but he does not take the reasoning to its logical conclusion. That fewer victors are known from the later Hellenistic period is connected to the later unpopularity of the literary genres of this period and to the calm epigraphic habit. It is impossible to determine in how far the contemporary (un)popularity of athletics affected this number, especially when working with absolute numbers.

This does not mean that a quantitative method can never be used for the study of ancient athletics. If one has a representative and continuous set of information, such as the list of *stadion* victors recorded by Eusebius, one can trace changes within this list, such as the geographical spread of the victors.[33] Even if one has a skewed distribution, for example if one lists the epigraphically attested victors, one can use a quantitative argument as long as one uses relative rather than absolute numbers: one should always consider evolutions within the evidence alongside the evolution of the evidence itself. Applied to our central question, this means that a decrease of references to athletics can be taken as a sign of declining popularity only if the evidence itself remains stable or decreases at a slower rate.

Defining decline in terms of adaptability

Thus far, we have focused on the limits of the approaches found in older and recent research. Defining decline in qualitative terms is subjective and typical of an outdated interpretative model of history. The new paradigm of transformation works well for an entire culture or civilization, but cannot be applied to every single aspect of that culture and is particularly unsuited for explaining endings. Defining decline in quantitative terms, a

[33] Farrington 1997: 16–19 also shortly discusses the geographical distribution, i.e. the evolution of the catchment area. More graphs and tables on this evolution can be found in Scanlon 2002: 44, 50, 57, 61, and 63 and in Remijsen 2009b: 173–75.

type of reasoning prevailing in research on imperial-age athletics, is difficult when applied to other periods: there are too many factors determining the state of our evidence.

Nevertheless, it is only thanks to insights from the previous decades that the end of Greek athletics can be successfully examined. Firstly, an element to be imitated from recent research on imperial-age athletics is its comprehensive approach. The inscription-based studies of the last thirty years have shown that Greek *agones* should be understood as an international phenomenon. In every stage of their history, the big four were only the symbolic pinnacle of a mass of similar contests. The end of the Olympics, or any other contest, was just one step in the collapse of the whole international circuit and cannot be fully understood outside this context. Secondly, the insight that change or adaptation is different from decline is fundamental. Every simplistic explanation of the collapse of the agonistic circuit (e.g. that natural disasters or barbarian raids destroyed the athletic infrastructure, or that the Christians did not like nudity) can be countered with the question of why the games were not adapted to this new situation (e.g. by rebuilding or, if money was not available, by holding the games in the open, or by reintroducing loincloths). External changes will not root out an established custom as long as there is a willingness to adapt it to the changed circumstances. Adaptability is therefore the opposite of decline.

The paradigm shift created an impasse: how can one explain an ending if one cannot look for 'decline'? We need not to shy away from the word 'decline', but to use it in a descriptive and not a normative sense. The ability and willingness to adapt a custom or institution can be used as criterion in a workable and non-judgmental definition: the decline of a custom or institution is a loss of interest by the parties involved, observable through a relative decrease of references in the source material and through an inability or unwillingness to adapt to changing historical circumstances. As long as a continued interest can be observed (through a relative increase or the maintenance of the status quo in references and/or through an ability and willingness to adapt) this custom or institution was not in decline.

Such a definition in terms of adaptability requires an explanation for the decline of the agonistic circuit on two levels: it must show on the one hand what historical changes created difficulties for the games and on the other why there was no willingness to adapt to these changes. The traditional explanations proposed before the 1980s already offered explanations on these two levels: because postclassical games and athletes no longer represented the traditional ideals they had originally embodied (panhellenism, sport for sport's sake), they had long become meaningless at the time when

external changes (barbarian raids, imperial policy) brought them to an end. The external changes could have such a grave impact only because the institution was weak to begin with. Because the ideological arguments were discredited, recent explanations discussed only the historical circumstances, and often even only the historical circumstances of the original Olympics. In order to explain not only why the games were in trouble, but also why society reacted to these troubles by abandoning the games, I would like to reintroduce this deeper level, although focusing on perceptions of athletics (of physical ideals, nudity, physical education, competition, spectacle, etc.) rather than ideology. If historical circumstances changed, but the perception remained supportive, a practice such as athletics might have experienced some trouble, but would gradually have adapted to the new situation. If the attitudes changed, on the other hand, for a while a custom or institution might have survived out of conservatism, as most people were not consciously dealing with these matters, but this would not last, as it made them more vulnerable to change.

Before an attempt at explaining the end of competitive athletics can even be started, it needs to be settled what actually happened, for the late-antique evidence for athletics has never before been systematically collected or studied. Part I forms the descriptive core of this book. It offers an overview of the history of athletics in late antiquity, arranged geographically in seven chapters, in order to determine when and at what pace the *agones* disappeared. Chronologically, this book starts where most books on imperial-age athletics finish, namely in the last quarter of the third century AD, and ends when the evidence does, that is in the reign of Theodosius II, but with occasional excursions into the sixth century. Although *agones* could contain athletic, artistic, and equestrian events, this book focuses only on the athletic events. This is largely a strategic choice: athletic contests are best represented in the evidence. For performing artists, there is often too little context to determine whether they were competing in *agones* or just giving shows. For equestrian events, it can be difficult to distinguish races at traditional *agones* from shows in the Roman style. For the fourth century AD, there is no evidence that equestrian events were even held at the *agones*. Information on athletics as a pastime was, though not rigorously excluded, not systematically collected either.

Part II will then attempt to explain the historical evolution described in Part I. Chapter 8, on the compatibility with Christianity, and Chapter 9, on the imperial policy towards *agones*, revisit the traditional explanatory model in which the athletic contests fell victim to a religiously inspired imperial ban. As will be shown, this top–down model is not convincing.

The next four chapters therefore explore an alternative, bottom–up, model: how did the people who were actively involved in the organization of *agones*, namely the athletes and the administrators of the *agones*, adapt to changes in society? Both of the chapters analyzing institutional changes, namely Chapter 10 on the composition and organizational structures of the athletes and Chapter 12 on the practical and in particular financial organization of the *agones*, are thus immediately followed by chapters on changing perceptions, namely Chapter 11 on athletics as an elite activity and Chapter 13 on the potentially problematic character of spectacles.

Throughout this book considerable attention will be paid to the situation in the imperial period, and occasionally even to how this situation had come into being in the Hellenistic period or before. Although these earlier periods are not the actual theme of this book, I found it valuable to include sometimes lengthy introductions, especially in Part I and the more institutional chapters of Part II: firstly because evidence for the later period is relatively scarce and succinct and therefore easily misunderstood if one does not compare it with the better-documented imperial-age context, and secondly because it is only possible to understand what led to the decline of athletics if one also understands why it used to be successful; one needs to understand how exactly the international agonistic circuit worked in order to see how any external changes could affect the *agones*.

The challenges set by the source material

An unavoidable problem for studies of the end of any phenomenon is the paucity of evidence for the crucial period. When people lose interest, they leave fewer traces. The source material for the last phases of Greek athletics is therefore not abundant, and mostly limited to major cities. For the majority of *agones* in the ancient world, there is not a single indication of their demise except for utter silence. Using the *argumentum e silentio* for proving decline is dangerous, however, as the disappearance of evidence for a phenomenon does not automatically imply the disappearance of this phenomenon. The scarcity of sources can be partially countered by collecting as many different types as possible. Letters, histories, remnants of stadia, or statues all cast light on athletics from a specific perspective, which can confirm or complete impressions from other perspectives. Knowledge about one contest can contextualize incomplete evidence for another contest of the same type.

Inscriptions, coins, and papyri Agonistic inscriptions, usually honorary inscriptions lauding athletes for their achievements, are the best evidence

for imperial-age athletics. Honorary inscriptions listing the official functions of local notables, including presidencies of games, are almost equally interesting. Inscription-based studies of athletics generally stop circa AD 270, however, because agonistic inscriptions dramatically decrease in number in the second half of the third century, and come to a complete stop in the 270s. While this dramatic change seems to suggest a drastic decline of the *agones*, in fact it just follows the Empire-wide epigraphic habit. The total number of Latin and Greek inscriptions gradually increased in the first century AD, grew at a faster rate in the second century to reach a peak in the reigns of Commodus and Septimius Severus, and then decreased to return to the level of the early first century in the second half of the third. In the East, where most agonistic inscriptions have been found, the low of the late third century is more pronounced than in the West, with an almost complete disappearance of inscriptions around 280.[34] This drop in the late third century is linked to the decrease of certain types of inscriptions in particular, in the first place honorary texts for local notables. From the late third century on, honorary inscriptions were largely restricted to provincial governors and other imperial magistrates. The rare examples honoring locals usually appeared as building inscriptions. Other types, such as funerary inscriptions, were less affected by these changes in the epigraphic habit.

The general evolution, with a peak in the late second century and a gradual decline in the third, is similar to evolutions in the number of datable shipwrecks, the construction of public building, meat consumption, or lead and copper pollution, and hence reflects the economy.[35] More specific evolutions, for example why some types were more affected than others, reflect changes with respect to self-representation and honoring, which cannot easily be explained by a single factor.[36] As the traditional habit of honoring local notables on stone declined, another long-established habit of honoring them gained in popularity: acclamations. Inscribed acclamations, either formally or as graffiti, are already attested in the third century, but became especially frequent in the fifth and sixth centuries, when the circus factions had spread in the entire empire, because acclamation was a central

[34] Mrozek 1973: 115 gives a graph for all Latin inscriptions (taken over in MacMullen 1982: 243); MacMullen 1986a: 237 for all inscriptions from Lydia. MacMullen also compared the results for Lydia with inscriptions from Syria, which have a similar chronological distribution. For a description that leaves more room for regional diversity see Borg and Witschel 2001: 50–78.

[35] Zuiderhoek 2009: 20–21. [36] Bodel 2001: 6–7; Borg and Witschel 2001: 90–93.

part of the circus experience. For athletics, however, these are only rarely informative.[37]

A second reason that most studies of imperial-age athletics stop in the 270s is that civic coins with agonistic images disappear around the same time. Particularly in the later second and third centuries, many cities used to depict agonistic motives on their coins to promote the local games. The numismatic habit is comparable to that of the inscriptions: an increase in the first two centuries, with a peak in the reigns of Commodus and Septimius Severus, followed by a decline. After a last small peak in the reigns of Valerian and Gallienus, civic mints became rare in the 270s.[38] After the reign of Tacitus, only Alexandria continued to strike its own coins, and in 296 even the Alexandrian tetradrachm was replaced by Roman coins.[39]

In the case of inscriptions and coins, we thus clearly meet the limits of a quantitative method.[40] The effect of the epigraphic and numismatic habit on our knowledge of athletics is profound. A decrease in the popularity of athletics would naturally lead to a decrease in references to athletics, but this is not true the other way around. Athletes disappeared from inscriptions, not because they no longer existed, but because it became rare to honor members of the local elite, to which they belonged, with inscriptions. In absolute numbers the drop in agonistic inscriptions may seem significant, but when compared to the total of honorary inscriptions for

[37] The volume of Bauer and Witschel (eds.) 2007 is dedicated to the changing statue habit, which is closely connected to the changing epigraphic habit. For the quantitative decline of honorary inscriptions, the literary style, and the popularity of acclamations, see particularly the introduction of the editors (1–24) and the contributions of Borg (43–77) and Bauer (79–109).

[38] Harl 1987: 107. [39] Bagnall 1985: 19–25.

[40] Zuiderhoek 2009: 20–22 deals with a similar methodological question: does the chronological pattern of the inscriptions (i.e. the epigraphic habit) represent the rise and fall of civic euergetism, or does it merely represent epigraphic fashion? He argues firstly that, given the correspondence between the chronological pattern of the inscriptions and other economic patterns, such as the chronological distribution of shipwrecks or meat consumption "the claim that the chronological pattern we observe in our data primarily reflects epigraphic fashion becomes much harder to sustain" and secondly that euergetism was intrinsically linked to inscriptions, because receiving honor was an essential aspect of euergetism. Therefore, he concludes that the epigraphic record is a fair quantitative representation of euergetism. Zuiderhoek's first argument does not justify his conclusion, as it may show only that the epigraphic habit was influenced by the general prosperity of the Empire. It does not say anything about the link between the evolution of a specific phenomenon, in casu euergetism, and the evolution of the sources for this phenomenon. It is of course likely that economic evolutions also affected euergetism, but in order to analyze this effect, it is more interesting to look at changing pattern in benefactions than to use a quantitative analysis of the source type. Moreover, it is possible to dispute his claim that the only way to honor a benefactor was through an inscription. As e.g. Borg 2007 has argued, the way in which people were honored was subject to fashion. When benefactions were no longer recorded in inscriptions, the community could have expressed their appreciation by, for example, in acclamations. This methodological problem does not discredit Zuiderhoek's analysis of how euergetism functioned.

local notables it is not. Similarly, agonistic coins disappeared because cities stopped minting their own money. This does not prove that the *agones* disappeared; there is simply no more numismatic evidence to inform us about them.

Nevertheless, epigraphy and numismatics can still offer some interesting details. The contorniates – technically festal medallions rather than coins – made in the fourth and fifth centuries, especially in Rome, display a variety of spectacle scenes, including some athletes.[41] Inscriptions relating in some way to athletics number little more than twenty in late antiquity, whereas in previous periods there had been thousands. Occasionally, late-antique honorary inscriptions, whether building inscriptions or on monuments for governors, still mention presidencies of games, particularly in Asia Minor, and in Rome a few texts even honor athletes. In these, the information is usually not presented as straightforwardly as before, because of the late-antique preference for stylized verses. This use of a poetic rather than technical language, in combination with the unfortunate lack of a date field in the epigraphic database of the Packard Humanities Institute, makes it, moreover, hard to trace relevant texts. Occasionally, archaeologists unearth exceptional new inscriptions. In 1994, the German team excavating Olympia came across a particularly interesting inscription listing victors of various, unconnected Olympiads, which is a thus far unattested genre, on a plate in bronze, a rarely preserved material.[42]

The papyrological habit is more continuous than the epigraphic habit. Although there are fewer papyri from the fourth century than from the third, especially as regards public documents, the decrease is more gradual and less pronounced than for the inscriptions.[43] Therefore, the use of the *argumentum e silentio* can be justified here, at least for well-documented sites such as Oxyrhynchus, certainly considering that a significant part of the information on athletics comes from private documents and archives. More than forty papyri from the late third century on are useful for this study. Although the most famous agonistic papyri are documents of the associations of athletes and performing artists, private letters, accounts, and documents from village and town archives can also contain interesting details. A *periodonikes* looking for his runaway slave, an estate manager ordering wine to be sent to a xystarch, a *hieronikes* figuring in a tax list, or an athlete applying for exemption from a liturgy all indicate the continuity

[41] Alföldi and Alföldi 1976: 213; 1990: 215–22. [42] Ebert 1997.

[43] This information is based on a search in the *Trismegistos* database (2011) for all third- and fourth-century papyri dated with a precision of at least twenty years.

of athletics. Often these documents cannot be termed 'agonistic', as athletics is referred to only in passing, but exactly this context enables scholars to locate (retired) competitors in their social milieu. Magical texts, moreover, on papyrus as well as on lead tablets, illustrate the deep feelings of insecurity experienced by the competitors.[44] Papyri are, however, available only for Egypt and there is almost never similar information available for a comparison with other regions.

Literary texts If there ever was a late-antique work devoted to athletics, this did not survive. All one can find are disparate passages on the topic, only rarely longer than a few sentences. This limits what we can do: for close reading of key texts in the style of König for the place of athletics in imperial-age elite culture, of Lada-Richards on pantomime in Lucian, or of Leyerle of (especially) theatrical spectacles in the work of John Chrysostom, one would need similar texts on late-antique athletics – or perhaps a lifetime to read all late-antique literature on related topics.[45] This does not mean, however, that nothing can be done.

Though most passages are brief, searching for a general athletic term in late-antique literature typically yields an incredibly high number of results. Athletics indeed remained a popular literary theme even after the agonistic circuit had fallen apart. Boxers, pankratiasts, contest presidents, or stadia, however, figure mostly in metaphorical images. These are in fact far too frequent (and repetitive) to be discussed comprehensively in this book.[46] Because most metaphors are general and vague, attempts to use them as historical evidence have led to few new insights on the later history of athletics. Thanks to their classical education, the literate upper class could use and understand a set of references even without personal experience with *agones*. Only if an author explicitly points out the link with reality to his audience, or if an untypical richness in detail and technical terms betrays the author's personal experience as a spectator, can they be used as evidence for real-life athletics. Reading them as evidence for a positive perception of athletics by their author, as some scholars do, is simplistic and should be avoided.[47] Athletic metaphors are in the first place literary

[44] Agonistic magic on lead tablets is collected in Tremel 2004, magical texts on papyri in Pap.Graec.Mag.

[45] König 2005; Lada-Richards 2007; Leyerle 2001.

[46] Several studies list selected metaphors (sometimes by one author) in a chronological or thematic order. Weismann 1972: 111–21; Mähl 1974: 56–64; Merkelbach 1975: 108–32; Jiménez Sánchez 2000; Koch 2007a: 45–158, Lugaresi 2008: esp. 220–60, 491–96, 514–18, 676–94, 716–22; Albanidis, Kasabalis, and Kassaris 2011.

[47] E.g. Albanidis, Kasabalis, and Kassaris 2011: 3. An example of good treatment of athletic metaphors in their historical and literary context, on the other hand, is Jones 2012.

instruments, and the interesting question is how they function in the literary work. Little has been done on this more interpretative level.[48] As a study of how late-antique authors – or even one late-antique author – used athletics as a theme would be a book in itself, I will limit myself to some general comments in Chapter 11 to explain why the theme was popular in the late-antique literary tradition and how Christian moralizing metaphors (used by e.g. John Chrysostom or Isidorus of Pelousium) differ from the way athletics is used as a literary tool in the rhetorical tradition (e.g. in the rhetorical handbooks of Menander Rhetor and pseudo-Dionysius, or in the orations of Themistius or Choricius of Gaza).

The scarcity of references to real-life athletics in the fairly continuous and well-presented literary genres can again indicate that the *agones* actually became less prominent as a part of civic life. Several historical details on real-life *agones* can be found in the works of historians, such as Ammianus Marcellinus and for Antioch especially John Malalas; in collections of letters, in particular by Libanius but also by other pagans (e.g. Julian) and even Christians (e.g. Isidorus of Pelousium); and occasionally in hagiographical texts, such as the *Life of Hypatios*. The majority of references to *agones* in literary works come, however, from rhetorical contexts, either orations by rhetoricians such as Libanius, Julian, and Himerius, or Christian sermons or treatises by authors such as John Chrysostom. The most famous Christian treatise in this connection, and the one that deals with athletics most extensively, is Tertullian's *De spectaculis*, but the value of this specific text as evidence for the present research project is in fact quite low: written in the late second century for a Latin-speaking audience it is hardly reflective of the perceptions of *agones* among those people who were likely to affect their demise. The treatise is, however, influential for the development of an extremely topical clerical discourse on games.[49] In this tradition, roughly the same criticisms are uttered again and again, although one can observe a gradual shift in emphasis from religious arguments to moral arguments (the reason for which will be discussed in Chapter 8). As hardly requires explanation, the radical clerical objection in no way reflects the opinion of the entire Christian community, nor does it indicate that the opinions held in Christian society were stable. A clear-cut condemnation is required by the genre. Tertullian had set the tone at a time when sacrifices were still an essential part of the games, and in the

[48] Exceptions are Poplutz 2004 on the purpose of Paul's agonistic metaphors; Jacob 2010 on the workings of the theater metaphor in Christian texts.

[49] See e.g. Puk 2012: 25–31.

heresy-obsessed world of the fourth century, it was hardly safe to publish a far milder view than the traditional.

In order to distill from any literary texts information on widely spread practices and perceptions, the rhetoric of the text needs to be taken into account.[50] Though always written by an individual, whose high level of education already distinguishes him from the majority of society, these texts betray elements of opposing opinions. Authors argue, criticize, or praise with a particular intention, colored by their own background and perspective. They choose arguments that they consider convincing, and consequently also recognizable, for their readers, and engage with arguments and opinions held by others. A treatise as the *On Spectacles* of Novatian should not be interpreted simply as representing the Christian standpoint regarding games, but as the opinion of one particular cleric, socialized in the Roman West and engaging with the influential treatise of Tertullian in a still unresolved discussion on the Christian attendance of spectacles. The arguments he tries to counter are even more interesting than the arguments he uses himself.

Legal texts Late-antique law collections contain about twenty laws concerning athletes or contests. Justinian's *Digesta* record several older laws, mostly regarding financial transactions involving athletes and the social status of competitors. The *Codex Theodosianus* and the *Codex Iustinianus* collect imperial constitutions, the former covering the period 313–437, the latter the period from Hadrian to 534. Most interesting for this study are the constitutions issued from Diocletian onward. When using these laws as evidence for the period in which they were promulgated, it is important to keep in mind how they came into existence. Even if they were theoretically valid for everyone in the Empire, they were not really issued as general rules, nor were there means to enforce them as such. Constitutions were typically reactive. They are addressed to Roman officials; these, or delegations from cities under their command, had asked the emperor for a judgment in a particular case.[51] Usually, the particularities of this case were unfortunately lost in the process of codification. As a law was the result of a dialogue between two parties, it can reveal two perspectives. A law addressed to the African government that allows the local notables to reinstitute an athletic contest does not indicate only that the emperor

[50] Cf. Webb 2008: 15–19.

[51] Humfress 2009: 390. This view is of course tributary to Millar 1977. For a systematic treatment of late-antique law making see Harries 1999.

tolerated this contest, but likewise that the local African notables were happy to organize it. The perspective of the initiating party can sometimes explain apparent contradictions in imperial policy: the same emperor can in one constitution order temples to be closed and in another that they be respected as places of traditional culture, depending on whether the delegation had presented a strong case for the danger they represented to the innocent Christian community or, alternatively, to the cultural heritage of the town.

Using laws as evidence for the time of codification is more problematic, especially for the sixth century. The *Codex Theodosianus* contains constitutions that had not been systematically collected before. The redaction of the texts and the choice to include particular constitutions can therefore be dated mostly to the 430s. That laws concerning *agones* were included, particularly in the chapters on spectacles (15.5–12) and on paganism (16.10) therefore indicates that the jurists of Theodosius II still considered them relevant. For the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, however, the question of contemporary relevance is more difficult.[52] This corpus represents an ambitious project to summarize the entire Roman law. Because of the sheer size of this project and the antiquity of many laws, the jurists relied more on earlier redactions than did the team behind the *Codex Theodosianus*. Usually, passages dealing with athletics in the *Codex Iustinianus* or *Digesta* belong to sections on a specific topic, for example on loans or on privileges. Often these sections, including the examples, were copied entirely from an earlier law collection of one of the great jurists from the Principate. Therefore, these laws cannot automatically be taken as evidence for the situation of the sixth century.

Archaeological evidence The period of the abandonment of an agonistic site can be a good indicator for the fate of local games. Restorations of stadia indicate a continued popularity of athletics. Destructions, encroachment, and a lack of maintenance, on the other hand, suggest the end of the games. The running track is particularly interesting in this respect, as this surface was diligently kept free of clutter as long as it was in use for games, so that athletes would not get hurt during the competition. When it was abandoned it quickly filled up. Small objects in this post-abandonment layer, such as sherds of oil lamps and coins, sometimes enable archaeologists to date this period with relative precision, as in particular the Austrian

[52] Gutsfeld 2013: 170 does assume that inclusion proves contemporary relevance. For the differences between the codification projects of Theodosian and Justinian see Matthews 2000: 11–12.

excavations at Ephesus have shown. Unfortunately only a few stadia have been excavated with attention to the late-antique period and published in accessible and detailed studies.[53] Most stadia have simply been located, or were studied with a focus on the architectural structure rather than on their historical evolution. Aphrodisias, Delphi, Ephesus, Isthmia, Olympia, and Rome have offered the most archaeological information. These data could be complemented with relevant evidence from about ten other sites. For gymnasia, I did not systematically collect the data myself.[54] The archaeological data regarding the abandonment of the athletic structures in these complexes, in particular the palaistra, are often ambiguous, as most gymnasia continued to be used as baths when athletic training no longer took place there.

Athletic images can offer far more vivid information than architectural structures. In theory, athletic images could occur on a multitude of objects. There are still a few fourth-century pieces of Italian glass with agonistic images (fig. 4) and on the Athenian agora archaeologists even found a fourth-century Panathenaic amphora.[55] The best sources, however, are larger decorations of buildings and public spaces. Agonistic images are frequently found in sculpture, wall-paintings, and mosaics. Since the erection of statues underwent the same evolution as the epigraphic habit[56] and wall-paintings are only occasionally preserved outside Pompeii and its surroundings, mosaics are the most interesting art form for the study of late-antique athletics. About two dozen mosaics pertain to the period under discussion, some of which show rich detail and form a welcome supplement to the textual evidence. As all athletic images on floors and walls were recently collected and studied by Bohne (2011), this book will systematically refer to her catalogue, which is virtually complete and lists all the relevant literature. To avoid cluttering up the footnotes, additional references will be given only when relevant.

The main problem with the use of mosaics as evidence is the uncertainty of their dates. In many cases, the archaeological contexts in which these objects were found were insufficiently studied, and dates have been proposed on purely stylistic grounds. This is not in all cases problematic,

[53] Lists of stadia with a short bibliography in Aupert 1979: 181–89 and Stephosi 2004: 274–75. For the Peloponnese see also Romano 1981, for Asia Minor Roos 1994. I would like to thank Ine Jacobs for sharing the extensive catalogue of her dissertation (2008) about the transformations of civic space (including stadia) in late-antique Asia Minor. General considerations on the late development of an archaeological interest in 'abandonment history' in Ward-Perkins 2011.

[54] Yegül 1992: esp. 313; Steskal 2003.

[55] Thompson 1960: 366; Caldelli 1993b.

[56] Bauer and Witschel (eds.) 2007 is entirely dedicated to the changing statue habit.

however. Characteristics that apply to the entire set of ancient mosaics – e.g. black and white versus polychrome, the use of glass tesserae, typical decorative elements – which have been studied with reference to several archaeologically dated examples, can offer reliable indicators in attributing a piece to a specific century. For stylistic characteristics typical of athletic mosaics (e.g. how naked athletic bodies are rendered), the reference set of securely dated material is on the other hand usually quite small. Often stylistic arguments refer to parallels in mosaics that have themselves no certain date. Among the most popular reference mosaics, for example, are those of the baths of Caracalla, for which dates ranging from the early third to the later fourth century have been proposed. With every new proposal, half of all athletic mosaics need to be redated accordingly.[57] Fortunately, there are other athletic mosaics that are dated on sound archaeological grounds, which can be used as reference pieces for certain iconographic trends. In Aquileia, a coin from 348–350 was embedded in the mortar immediately below a large mosaic containing several frames with athletes – mostly busts, but also some full-figure athletes – within a geometrical field.[58] At Piazza Armerina in Sicily and at Daphne near Syrian Antioch, agonistic mosaics were found in securely dated villa-complexes, from the years 310–330 and the 340s respectively.[59] These reference mosaics represent two distinct styles of athletic mosaics: those representing athletes interacting and competing, and those representing individually framed champions. The adherence of a mosaic to one of these styles will be an important factor in the decision to accept (or not accept) it as evidence for late-antique athletics. In order to avoid repetition in Part I, they deserve closer attention here.

The depiction of competitions was the more traditional style. The majority of earlier athletic mosaics indeed depict one or several matches of one of the combat sports. Mosaics depicting more events of an *agon* are rarer,[60] but seem to become relatively more common in the fourth century, and are typically laid out in a square or rectangle made up of several horizontal bands. One of the mosaics from Piazza Armerina shows an entire musical *agon* in three horizontal levels (Fig. 3). Another piece from

[57] Werner 1995, a catalogue of Roman mosaics, for example, dates most of the athletic mosaics in the fourth century, on the basis of a date under Diocletian for those in the baths of Caracalla (his K115).
[58] Bohne 2011: K1a.
[59] Bohne 2011: K83 (Daphne) and K26a and b and Carandini, Ricci, and de Vos 1982: 272 (Piazza Armerina).
[60] More complete early mosaics are Bohne 2011: K22 (Ostia), K67 (Tusculum), K77 (Patras), or K115 (Vienne).

the same villa and the mosaic from the Constantinian villa at Daphne seem to do the same for an athletic *agon*, but are unfortunately both very fragmentary. The only complete depiction of an athletic *agon*, in this case on four horizontal bands, was found in the ancient town of Capsa in modern-day Tunisia (Fig. 6).[61] A recurring iconographic element (in Piazza Armerina on the mosaic of the musical *agon* and on a mosaic from the same villa with a wrestling contest between Eros and Pan, and on the example from Capsa) is the presence of money bags among the prizes. These are uncommon on the many earlier depictions of prize tables, although distributing prize money in bags was normal practice.[62] The emergence of the sack of money, usually inscribed with a number, as a typical iconographical element may perhaps be linked to the introduction of the *follis* (literally money bag) as monetary unit for 12,500 denarii under Diocletian. Both mosaics from Piazza Armerina have the number 12.5 (Fig. 3), the prize-table of Eros and Pan also shows the symbol for denarius before the amount. The prize-table at Capsa has inscribed money bags, which contained 25,000 denarii. As the face-value of the *follis* is known to have doubled in 301, this may point to a date not long afterwards.[63] Other arguments, in particular the style of the tunics, also support a date for the Capsa mosaic in the early fourth century.

The second style, where athletes are framed individually, often only above the shoulders, is not attested on any mosaics that must predate the late third century on strong archaeological or even stylistic grounds, and therefore seems to have been specifically late antique.[64] The framed athletes of the baths of Caracalla seem to belong to an early phase in the development of this style, and may indeed have inspired its popularity. The whole mosaic shows only athletes: full-figure athletes alternate with busts and are separated only by thin frames.[65] Other examples show a higher

[61] Bohne 2011: K89.

[62] Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 1, l. 23–24. The only earlier example on mosaic, Bohne 2011: K44 (shortly after AD 220), shows a money bag with the pre-inflation number CL. Occasionally, they occur on coins, cf. Dunbabin 2010: 343–45; Bohne 2011: K55*, for which both archaeological as stylistic grounds point to a fourth-century date, carries the number XX, probably implying 20,000 denarii.

[63] Bagnall 1985: 17–18, 20. Due to the hyperinflation of the early fourth century, exact monetary values are hard to trace, and Khanoussi's suggestion (1988: 559–60) that the value of the *follis* was officially 25,000 *denarii* from 301 until a reform by Constantine in the late 320s, which would date the mosaic in this time-span, must remain hypothetical. This is probably the reason why Pausz and Reitinger 1992, which is largely a summary of the articles by Khanoussi, ignore it completely.

[64] Mosaics with athletic busts: Bohne 2011: K1 (Aquileia), K23 (Ostia), K51, K55, K56a–c (Rome) K61 (near Aquileia), K85b (Seleukeia Pieria), and K100 (Thapsus).

[65] Bohne 2011: K56a–b.

proportion of busts and thicker frames (e.g. Fig. 2). Some mosaics with framed busts of athletes also include frames with inscribed monumental crowns. A crown on the mosaic from Aquileia (*terminus post quem* 348) refers, for example, to Olympic games. Such inscribed crowns are not attested in earlier mosaics,[66] but this should be attributed to coincidence rather than an iconographical trend. Monumental prize crowns are in fact a very common agonistic image from the late second century on, and, among the many examples on third-century inscriptions and coins, several are inscribed.[67] It is not, however, a normal iconographical element in mosaics that with certainty belong to the second or third century. The mosaics of Aquileia represent a late stage in the development of this mosaic style: the athletes appear in thick frames within a geometrical background and a clear majority of them is depicted only above the shoulders. Although the majority of the figurative frames represent athletes, some frames show elements from other spectacles such as *venationes* or even mythical scenes. The habit of mixing images from various entertainments is uncommon in the preceding periods and hence can also be used, in combination with other indicators, as an argument for a late-antique date.[68] As we will see, the increasing readiness to mix images of athletes with other types of spectacles reflects the more frequent combination of these events in real games in the fourth century.

Whereas the images on the mosaics are in any case interesting, the distribution of mosaics can be used only to a certain extent for the study of the popularity of athletics in late antiquity – as was the case for inscriptions and coins. Geographically, there is a clear discrepancy between the popularity of athletic images and that of real *agones* in the West and the East. Whereas the latter were mostly popular in the eastern half of the Mediterranean, as amply demonstrated by all other types of sources, the majority of athletic mosaics in fact come from the West. This at first glance odd distribution can be explained by differences in artistic taste: in the East, mythological allegorical themes seem to have been far more popular than those pertaining to daily life, unlike in the West. Of course, the extent of archaeological excavations and the likelihood of preservation in specific

[66] Inscribed crowns are only attested in Bohne 2011: K1a (Aquileia), K61 (near Aquileia) and K80 (Akmoneia) and moreover in SEG XXXII 1089 (Althiburos) and SEG L 412 (Sparta).

[67] Examples and discussion in Dunbabin 2010: 304–39.

[68] The other examples of athletes occurring on the same mosaic as other entertainment are Bohne 2011: K69 (Chios), K95 (Thuburbo Maius), K98–99 (Carthage), K103 (Tebessa), K107 (Mérida), and K127 (Trier).

regions also distorts the results.[69] Nor does the chronological distribution give us a clear indication of the historical popularity of athletics: whereas athletics was popular in Greece throughout antiquity, all known depictions on floors stem from the imperial period, again because figurative mosaics at that point gained popularity as decorative art, and because later building phases have left more material traces. Fortunately for us, late-antique mosaics are least likely to be destroyed by later building activity. Many of these late-antique examples in fact illustrate the continuing popularity of this form of decorative art into the fifth and sixth centuries. Most examples date from churches, for which athletic scenes were obviously not preferred.[70] From other contexts we still have multiple scenes from the amphitheater and the circus in the late fourth and fifth centuries.[71] That athletic themes disappear from the mid fourth century on therefore does seem to reveal a significant change.

In most regions of the central and eastern Mediterranean, at least one of the source types discussed above is attested, and usually several types can be combined to construct a fuller picture. Although, even when combined, the available evidence still leaves gaping lacunae in our knowledge of late-antique athletics, the more descriptive Part I will show that the material nevertheless enables us to discern the broad outlines of fourth- and fifth-century evolutions. Many of the sources even contain striking details on the organization and perception of *agones* that, as will be discussed in the explanatory Part II, can shed a light on why these changes took place.

[69] Bohne 2011: 9–13. [70] Bohne 2011: 15.
[71] E.g. Dunbabin 1978: 75–76, 81, 97, 99, 107; Huskinson 2004: 141.

PART I

An overview of athletics in late antiquity

A very short history of Greek athletic contests

Late-antique athletics can only be understood against the background of athletics in the previous centuries: its spread and popularity was strongly tied to what had happened before. Therefore, each chapter of Part I will start with an introduction on a regional agonistic tradition, explaining when athletics was introduced in a particular part of the Mediterranean and how densely *agones* were spread there. What a contest was like did not depend on regional circumstances, however. From early on, athletics was an international phenomenon, a meeting ground for the citizens of different Greek *poleis* connected in an ever increasing network. Across the (more or less) hellenized world, there was one contest circuit, characterized by a uniform organization, rules, and technical vocabulary. The broad outlines of this circuit's historical evolution will be sketched here, with particular attention for the professionalization of its organization and the development of technical terms – as the latter are unfortunately often used anachronistically.[1]

Although the origin of Greek athletics is unclear,[2] by the archaic period contests connected to several important sanctuaries had obviously acquired

[1] A brief overview does not allow room for precise references, details, and nuance, and can therefore offer only a generalized and subjective view of a millennium of athletic history. Finley and Pleket 1976, Robert 1984, Young 1984, Mitchell 1990, Roueché 1993, van Nijf 1999, Scanlon 2002, König 2005, Nicholson 2005, Slater 2007, Scott 2010 are just some of the studies that influenced this view. The strong emphasis on the only gradual structuring, internationalization, and conceptualization of categories in ancient athletics is largely my own, and several elements have been explained in Remijsen 2011. The regional overviews in the rest of Part I are likewise based on earlier overviews, some more thorough and insightful than others, if available at all. I did not systematically collect all earlier evidence, but benefitted from Leschhorn's list of games on agonistic coins (1998), from the volume on the Hellenistic gymnasium edited by Kah and Scholz (2007), and most of all from the selection of agonistic inscriptions and the list of Olympic victors by Moretti (1953 and 1957, supplemented in 1970 and 1992).

[2] For discussions about the origins see for example the contributions of Renfrew, Puhvel, Mallwitz, and Lee in Raschke 1988.

a wide appeal in the Greek world. These contests had, besides the athletic competition (the ἀγών γυμνικός) that forms the subject of this book, usually an equestrian and/or artistic competition as well. Many were by no means local events: the development of a more or less uniform set of competitions (four running events, namely the *stadion, diaulos, dolichos*, and race-in-armor; the *pentathlon*; and three combat sports, namely boxing, wrestling, and *pankration*) with shared rules stimulated international (i.e. inter *poleis*) participation. The *agones* became important venues for the self-promotion, cultural interaction, and networking activities of individual Greek aristocrats. The better organized the games became, the more *agones* also stimulated diplomatic contacts between cities. As sanctuaries did not have the necessary manpower, *poleis* took the organization upon themselves: they sent embassies to announce the games and the truce, which protected the city and the participants during the festival, to many different cities, where these ambassadors were received by designated hosts; they sent delegations to participate in the ceremonies and contests of other festivals; and they erected monuments in international sanctuaries to commemorate agonistic as well as political successes. Because victories of local athletes increased the glory of a city, some *poleis* started in the sixth century BC to award privileges to their own victorious citizens.[3]

In the classical period, the organization of games became somewhat more structured and the rules better defined. By the early fifth century a hierarchy of contests had developed, with as the undisputed number one the contest held at Olympia, followed by the Pythian games at Delphi, the games at Isthmia, and those at Nemea. The pre-eminence of these four contests is clearly attested by victory inscriptions and the work of Pindar. It is important to note, however, that they formed only an informal top four. Classical inscriptions and poetic odes mention also other contests, most on the Greek mainland, but also a few in other Greek areas such as southern Italia, the coasts of Asia Minor, and Cyrenaica. Moreover, the ordering of Pindar's work into four categories, the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean odes, is from a later date and somewhat artificial. Three of the Nemean odes do not celebrate Nemean victories at all.[4] Nor was there a word (such as the later term '*periodos*', or the modern 'panhellenic') to set the top four apart. Only in the fourth century BC did the literati start to describe these games as *stephanitai* ('crown games'). This word refers to

[3] See the inscription from Sybaris discussed in Ebert 1972: 251–55; Xenophanes Fr. 2; Diogenes Laertius, *Solon* 1.55. Cf. Finley and Pleket 1976: 77.

[4] *Nem.* 9 celebrates a victory in Sikyon and *Nem.* 10 one in Argos. *Nem.* 11 is not a victory ode at all.

the – from a financial perspective – worthless crown of leaves which, since the privileges awarded in the home towns of victors offered athletes sufficient incentive to compete, was the only prize at these games. This does not mean, however, that we can refer to 'stephanitic' or 'crown games' as a category of games in the classical period, for the word did not enter the technical athletic vocabulary, as known from the inscriptions, until the third century BC and by that time denoted a broader group of games than the informal top four. Similarly, the term *periodos* was coined only in the second century BC for marking out these four top games in particular, and will be used to refer to them only from that time on. Finally, the modern term 'panhellenic' is anachronistic and in no way limited to the top four. It can, however, be applied to the classical period to express the idea, developed in the early fifth century BC, that athletic games were open to all Greeks. This notion was first expressed in the new name for the Olympic judges, *hellanodikai*.[5] In this period in which the Greeks were actively looking for a shared cultural identity in response to the Persian threat, the fact that athletics was a custom shared by all Greeks may have formed a real stimulus for the games. That athletics was indeed popular in the classical period is evident in the many references in visual arts and literature, and the obvious interest of political figures in the games as venues for self-representation.

The Hellenistic period introduced many changes. Greek culture gradually spread to inland Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria, and even as far as Bactria. The Greek ruling class of new and older *poleis*, as well as the Hellenistic kings, promoted athletics as an elite lifestyle and introduced new contests. The Greek character of athletics was once again an important factor in its attractiveness, as in the newly conquered areas Greekness represented an elite quality. In the third century initiatives were mostly limited to coastal areas, but from the second century on gymnasia and games were founded deeper inland too. Most new games were instituted in western Asia Minor, but there was also a stream of reorganizations in the Greek mainland. Behind these institutions and reorganizations was the ambition to set a city on the map as a center of international importance. Cities wanted to give their games the same allure as the top four, and therefore started in the mid third century to present them as 'stephanitic'. Embassies announcing a contest now explicitly asked for the acknowledgement of this status, and the connected privileges for victors at their homes. This gradually

[5] This name is first attested shortly after the Persian wars: see Zoumbaki 2001: 138.

standardized procedure for the acknowledgement of status now made 'stephanitic' a technical category of *agones*. Yet although the frequent institution of new games stimulated diplomatic contacts across the enlarged Greek world, the athletic circuit had not yet become truly international in the third and second centuries. Top competitors still traveled mostly within Greece, the athletes from the Greek mainland as well as the gradually growing group of champions from the periphery. Only in the first century BC, when Roman power was well established in most parts of the Greek world, competitors habitually made further journeys. This new cosmopolitan lifestyle of the athletes was made easier by their inclusion in an athletic association, the history of which will be sketched in Chapter 10.

The evolution towards internationalization, uniformization, and professional cooperation was accelerated under the Roman Empire, in which athletics continued to be an important aspect of the elite lifestyle in the cities. The traditionalism of *agones* was a real asset in this age, the so-called Second Sophistic, which was characterized by the desire to create an elite identity by connecting to the classical past. The second and third centuries in particular were marked by an astounding increase in the number of games.[6] Most new games were founded in Asia, Syria, and Egypt, but athletics spread to the West as well, first to Italy and then also to southern Gaul and northern Africa. Games were organized in regional networks, which together formed a structured agonistic circuit. As before, victors in the most prestigious games enjoyed a range of privileges and achieved a high social status in their local communities. Differences in rank were expressed by means of a new categorization system for games: their status might now be eiselastic and/or sacred or else thematic. Victors of games with both sacred and eiselastic status received special honors, exemptions from public duties, and monetary pensions at home, while victors of sacred games without eiselastic status received the same exemptions and some special honors, but no pensions. Victors of thematic contests enjoyed no kind of privileges at home, but might still return there with valuable prizes won abroad.

The stream of agonistic inscriptions and of agonistic themes on coins, in visual arts and in literature leaves no doubt that the second and the early and mid-third century AD was a boom time for Greek athletics. These sources disappear, however, in the late third century. That is where our story begins.

[6] Leschhorn 1998: 31 counts over 500 contests in the imperial period.

Late-antique athletics by region

What happened to the *agones* after the disappearance of the epigraphic and numismatic sources in the late third century has never been studied, certainly not systematically. This first part therefore aims to describe their late-antique history, in as far as this can be reconstructed on the basis of the sources. In order to give an overview of the evidence arranged by region, I have divided the Mediterranean into seven large areas separated by geographical barriers, such as mountains, seas, or deserts, which roughly coincide with borders between late-antique dioceses.

Although the first chapter is entitled 'Greece', the first region in fact covers the entire Balkan peninsula, that is the dioceses of Macedonia, Thrace, and Dacia. As athletics never spread far north, most attention will naturally go to Greece, which had the longest and liveliest athletic tradition. The islands in the Aegean are included with Greece and not with Asia Minor, but this pragmatic choice does not affect the picture, as most late-antique evidence concerns the mainland anyway. Asia Minor includes the dioceses of Asia and Pontus, although the eastern provinces of Pontus in effect fall outside the scope of this work, as athletics never spread into Armenia. The cities in Greece and Asia Minor mentioned in the book are shown together on a map (Map 1). The Taurus mountains form the southeastern border of Asia Minor as discussed in this book, since these mountains formed a considerable physical obstacle for travelers, and so the contest circuit of Cilicia was easier to reach from the south. Cilicia is therefore considered alongside Syria, with which it was also administratively incorporated in the diocese of the East. This then forms the third region (Map 3), which I will refer to simply as Syria in the title of chapter 3. Only rarely will the evidence for this region take us beyond the eastern border of the Roman Empire. The fourth chapter will deal with the diocese of Egypt, including Cyrenaica (Map 4). Most evidence, however, comes from Egypt itself. After this eastern semicircle, attention will turn to the western Mediterranean. The fifth region, Italy, covers the dioceses of Suburbicarian and Annonarian Italy. The few depictions of athletics found in adjacent Pannonia will be discussed under this heading as well. The sixth region covers everything to the west of Italy, that is the whole prefecture of Gaul. As athletics never spread widely in the West, most evidence will come from southern Gaul. The seventh and last chapter of Part I deals with the diocese of Africa. The relevant places in these three western regions are shown together on one map (Map 5).

The evidence for athletics in the late-antique Mediterranean is very diverse, and not only in quantity. Some sites have well-documented

excavations, others are mainly known from literary texts, and elsewhere documentary sources prevail. The subdivisions of each chapter therefore depend on the local evidence. For a region such as Egypt, with documents covering a large spectrum of cultural life, a thematic approach is most fruitful, while for Greece or Asia Minor, where archaeology offers most details, the logical approach is to arrange the information by site. Still, the resulting picture of late-antique athletics will at times seem accidental and disparate. Information from a single region, usually pertaining to only one or two sites, is not representative for the general evolution. In the conclusion, I will try to discover what the seven regions had in common, in order to sketch a general chronology and trace historical evolutions.

CHAPTER 1

Greece

The agonistic tradition

Greece had the oldest tradition of *agones* in the Mediterranean. By the late sixth century BC, biennial or quadrennial contests with athletic, artistic, and/or equestrian competitions were relatively widespread in the Greek mainland (see Map 1).[1]

The four games that grew to be the most prestigious were all found here: the quadrennial Olympic games at Olympia, (usually) organized by the *polis* Elis, the quadrennial Pythian games at Delphi, organized by the Delphic Amphictyony, and the biennial Isthmian games and Nemean games, held at the sanctuaries of Isthmia and Nemea respectively. A number of other contests also existed in Greece, however, such as the *Panathenaia* in Athens, the *Hekatomboia* in Argos, the *Asklepieia* in Epidaurus, and the *Lykaia* in Arcadia.[2] The participants were young men with the leisure and money to train and tour around Greece, who could affirm their status as aristocrats or, as the field of participants grew with the democratization of the *poleis*, as members of a broader local elite.

Athletic enthusiasts trained together with their peers in an area designated as a 'gymnasium', which from the fourth century on was monumentalized and institutionalized. An important aspect of this institutionalization is the introduction of the ephebate, a system of citizen training for youths. It was developed in Athens around 380 BC as a mandatory training for two years for all citizens in their nineteenth and twentieth year. In the late fourth century, however, the ephebate was reduced to one year and became voluntary. Around the same period, it started spreading across the Greek world.[3]

[1] See IAG 3–10.

[2] See for example Diagoras' victories in Pindar, *Olympian* 7, 80–87 (the four top games, but also Athens, Argos, Arcadia, Thebes, Pellana, Aegina, and Megara), or the victory lists in IAG 16, 21, 23.

[3] Kennell 2006, ix–xii; Scholz 2007: 14–15. The historical development of the ephebate was recently described in detail in a 600-page monograph: Chankowski 2010.

Map 1 Map of Greece and Asia Minor.
Legend: 1. Thespiae 2. Chalcis 3. Thebes 4. Plataea 5. Lebadeia 6. Epidaurus 7. Mantinea 8. Nemea 9. Sikyon 10. Laodicea 11. Magnesia 12. Tralleis 13. Eumenia 14. Hierapolis 15. Philadelphia 16. Sardis 17. Thyateira 18. Halicarnassus 19. Smyrna 20. Erythrae

Already before gymnasium culture had attained its typical form, athletics had spread to Greek settlements elsewhere in the Balkans. In the *poleis* along the Thracian coasts, games for local heroes had been held since the classical period. In the Hellenistic period were added games for the gods of the gymnasium, in the first place Hermes and Herakles.[4] These games in the northern Balkans remained small-scale and local. Two festivals in Epirus, on the other hand, the *Nymphaia* in Apollonia and the *Naa* in Dodona, additionally attracted athletes from Greece in the Hellenistic period.[5]

Throughout the Hellenistic period Greece maintained the densest circuit of contests of the growing Hellenic world; it continued to challenge local athletes and attracted champions from other regions. Most games went back to the fourth century or earlier, but in the early Hellenistic period new games were added as well: for example the *Soteria* at Delphi, the *Trophonia* at Lebadeia, or the *Ptolemaia* in Athens. From the late second century BC on, when Greece and Macedonia had come under Roman rule, *Rhomaia* appeared in several cities, for example at Chalcis.[6] The four traditional top games retained their pre-eminence; their special status was officialized in the later second century BC, when people started to refer to them as the *periodos*. Hellenistic kings treated these four games with particular respect, as is clear from the monuments they erected in the sanctuaries and from royal participation in the horse races.[7] The Nemean games underwent some change: in the mid third century, the Argives – who had controlled the games since the fourth century – built a stadium in their own city and moved the reorganized *Nemea* here, together with their own *Hekatomboia* – now called *Heraia* (and later the *Shield of Argos*).[8]

After the battle of Actium, Augustus celebrated his victory over Marc Antony and Cleopatra by building Nikopolis and founding the *Aktia*. Right from their introduction in 27 BC, these surpassed the other Epirote games in popularity, and in the following century they became a gateway between the games of Greece and Italy.[9] In Greece too, new games were introduced in the imperial period. In Sparta, for example, *Ourania* were founded under Nerva, *Eurykleia* under Hadrian, and *Olympia Kommodeia* under Commodus. This last contest certainly received eiselastic status, as

[4] Albanidis and Giatsis 2007: 179–81. [5] IAG 40, 51. [6] IAG 40, 43–45, 50–54, 56.
[7] For royal donations in Delphi and Olympia see Schmidt-Donaus 2000: 181–209. For the victories of the Ptolemies and their monuments in panhellenic sanctuaries see Remijsen 2009a: 249–55, 261–62.
[8] Amandry 1980: 226–31, 244–47.
[9] Both the *Naa* in Dodona and the *Nymphaia* in Apollonia are still attested in the imperial period, though only rarely mentioned in victory lists. See Strasser 2004b: 551–53.

did the more traditional *Panathenaia* in Athens and the *Asklepieia* in Epidaurus. Under Hadrian, Athens even received three new eiselastic contests, the *Panhellenia*, the *Olympia*, and the *Hadrianeia*.[10] The success of these new games can be explained by Hadrian's shrewd scheduling of them before or after established contests in Greece. Several classical and Hellenistic games were, on the other hand, never heard of again in the imperial period.

As new games sprouted all over the Greek world under the Roman Empire, Greece itself became comparatively less important for the athletes. The games in the coastal cities of Asia Minor were already incorporated in the Greek circuit by the first century BC, but in the first century AD competitors also traveled to Italy and even Syria. Victories obtained in Greece now constituted a much smaller part of victory lists than before. This internationalization also affected the chances of local athletes: while in the third century BC Greece still produced about half of the Olympic victors, in the first and second centuries AD all the cities of the Balkans combined no longer produced even a quarter.[11] Thanks to the four games of the *periodos*, however, the pre-eminence of Greece within the international circuit did not disappear altogether. Only the *Aktia* and the Italian games ever came near to becoming as important as the traditional top four.[12] Victories in the *periodos* still figured at the top of victory lists, although their location now had to be specified – e.g. the Olympics in Pisa – as there were many new games with the same names. In the panhellenic sanctuaries building activity did not cease. Sports infrastructure and temples continued to be restored, and more than before the sanctuaries invested in the comfort of athletes and guests. In Olympia, for example, a monumental fountain and several new guest-houses and baths were constructed.[13]

Because of the traditional timing of the four top contests, Greece was the only region visited every year by top athletes. Starting with the *Olympia* and *Isthmia* in the first summer of an Olympiad, competitors traveled to Athens in the fall for the *Hadrianeia*. Having spent the second summer in Italy, they traveled in the second fall to Epirus for the *Aktia* and from there

[10] See Spawforth 1989 for a discussion of *agones* in Roman Greece.
[11] Remijsen 2009b: 173–75, on the basis of Moretti's Olympic victor list (1957, 1970, 1992).
[12] The *Aktia, Kapitolia, Sebasta*, and *Eusebeia* may have completed the περίοδος τέλεια. See Gouw 2009: 144–46.
[13] Mallwitz 1972: 108–09, 149–55, 206–10, 252–54, 274–77; Bol 1984; Hitzl 1991. For the recent excavations of the baths north of the *prytaneion*, the Leonidaion baths, and the southwest building see Sinn *e.a.* 1992–1997 and Kyrieleis 2003: 1–65.

to Argos. Originally, the *Nemea* were scheduled earlier, in late summer, but because the quadrennial *Sebasta* at Naples and the *Aktia* at Nikopolis lured away athletes from the biennial *Nemea*, at some point (at the latest in the reign of Hadrian) both the *Shield of Argos* and the *Nemea* had moved to late fall. Pausanias (2.15.3) therefore refers to the *Nemea* in the second year of the Olympiad as the 'Winter *Nemea*'. The *Panathenaia* were similarly moved forward from summer to early spring and the *Isthmia* postponed from spring to late summer to avoid overlap with the games in Asia Minor. The rescheduling saved traditional games from early demise. After an Asian tour in the spring and early summer of the third year, athletes returned again to Greece to compete in the *Pythia* and *Isthmia*. In the fourth year, they had several options: after potentially spending a winter in Egypt, they could travel further to Syria or they could return to Greece to compete in the Peloponnesian circuit, with the games in Mantinea and Sparta, before going to Argos for the *Nemea* and from there to Rhodes for the *Halieia*. The *Asklepieia* in Epidaurus, the traditional Boeotian games (the *Trophonia* at Lebadeia, the *Eleutheria* at Plataea, and the *Herakleia* at Thebes) and the *Olympia* of the Macedonian *koinon* would have had a place on this circuit too, but where they fit in cannot be determined with certainty.[14]

Profiting from the internationalization of the agonistic circuit, the games in the Roman province of Thracia, especially along the Bosporus, could finally develop a wide catchment area. Many new games appeared here in the second and third centuries. Their introduction was sometimes connected to imperial visits, in particular by the Severi. The games of Byzantium and Perinthos could attract the competitors of the games in northern Asia Minor (Troad, Mysia, and Bithynia), with which they apparently formed one local circuit. From Perinthos, these competitors could also travel inland to Philippopolis, where a monumental stadium was built under Caracalla.[15]

[14] For the order of the main contests see Strasser 2010: 620–21 and Gouw 2009: 51–55, 72–92. In 91–92, Gouw places the *Nemea* of the fourth year in December too, in analogy with the second year. The specific reference to the 'winter *Nemea*' by Pausanias (2.15.3: Νεμείων τῶν χειμερινῶν) only makes sense, however, if they had to be distinguished from the normal 'summer *Nemea*'. See Strasser 2000: 447. For the *Isthmia* see Strasser 2010: 610. In reaction to Gouw 2008 (and unaware of the more detailed but unpublished treatment of the same issue by Strasser 2000: 462–80) Shear 2012 proposes an alternative but too Athenocentric interpretation in which the *Panathenaia* remain in the summer, but the *Pythia* and *Isthmia* lose their biennial rhythm.

[15] For games in Roman Thrace see Albanidis and Giatsis 2007: 181–95. That they formed a local circuit with northern Asia Minor can be deduced from IGR I 802, CIG 3676, IAG 90, and SEG XXVII 843.

The decline of the games in Greece and the rest of the Balkans is, as for other regions, usually placed around 270. After this date, information becomes sparse indeed. The games in Thrace disappear completely from the picture, since they were attested only on provincial coins and inscriptions. Late-antique literary sources exist only for the most famous contests. In some cases, this information is supplemented by archaeological finds. We are best informed about the Olympics, which will be discussed first. These remained the symbolic number one contest, mentioned more often by fourth-century authors than any other *agon*.[16] Nevertheless, they were also just one stop in a circuit of games and their attractiveness depended on the fate of other contests.

Olympia and the Olympic games after AD 267

The traditional view of the decline of the Olympic games attributes an important role to the invasion of the Herulians. This Germanic people joined the Goths raiding the coasts of the Black Sea in the reign of Gallienus and in 267 overran Achaea. Although the invasion of Attica is the best documented, the Herulians brought destruction to cities in the Peloponnese as well, for example in Corinth, Sparta, and Argos.[17] That they threatened Olympia is not attested in literary sources, but has been deduced from the absence of new inscriptions after the 260s and from damage to several buildings in the late third century. The spoliation of older monuments for the construction of a fortification wall around the temple of Zeus, which has similarly been connected to the Herulian raid, seemed to confirm that after 267 the sanctuary lay in ruins and the games had lost all their former glory.[18] Because almost no victors from the late

[16] E.g. Libanius, *Or.* 11, 12; Julian, *Or.* 3 (no. Budé); Himerius, *Or.* 36; Themistius, *Or.* 3, 8, 16, Menander Rhetor 365–367 (ed. Russell and Wilson 1981), Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ars rhetorica* 1 (in Teubner edition of Dionysius of Halicarnassus).

[17] *Historia Augusta, Gallieni duo* 13.6–10; Georgius Syncellus 717.

[18] The fortification wall was for the first time connected to the Herulians during the excavation of one of its towers in the mid 1950s, on the basis of "Fundbeobachtungen und die in mehreren Schnitten festgestellten Schichtzusammenhänge" (i.e. on the basis of the inclusion of earlier third-century material, such as inscriptions, in the wall and of a supposed connection with the damage to other buildings around this time). Cf. Kunze 1958: 5 and Sinn 1991: 367. A connection between the Herulians and the end of the inscriptions listing cult personnel was made already in the late nineteenth century in the commentary on IvO 59 (accepted by Rappaport, art. 'Heruli', in RE VIII.1 (1912)). Mallwitz 1972: 110–17 paints a black picture with the Herulians actually raiding the sanctuary, while Herrmann 1972: 193–95 does not believe in a raid, but still describes the site as largely in ruins; Scanlon 2002: 59 similarly writes that the siege preparations "scarred the site permanently" and "marked the beginning of the end".

third and fourth centuries are known, it seemed safe to assume that after the invasion the Olympics were held only irregularly until their eventual demise under Theodosius.[19]

Sinn, chief archaeologist of the excavation project "Olympia während der römischen Kaiserzeit" since 1987, has disputed this traditional theory. There are in fact no archaeological indications for a Herulian raid on Olympia. The late third-century damage to buildings must have occurred after the 267 invasion: in the layer that directly predates the damage, excavators of the *prytaneion* have found a coin from 280–282. The destructions can be explained more convincingly by an earthquake around the turn of the century.[20] The lack of late inscriptions does not prove a raid either, as this can be explained by Empire-wide changes in the epigraphic habit.

These new insights reveal that the late third-century date of the fortification wall, proposed in the 1950s, rests on shaky grounds as well. Because third-century inscriptions were used in the construction, the mid third century is obviously the *terminus post quem*, but for the actual date of the wall there are few archaeological indications. Sinn has proposed to return to the date in the second half of the fifth century suggested by the first excavators. It should be noted, however, that the early excavators did not all agree on this date: proposals of team members ranged from the late fourth to the early sixth century, depending on which invasion the wall was linked to and which fortifications were considered parallels. Boetticher considered it a reaction to the invasion of the Goths in 395. Weil did not pinpoint a precise date, but called the wall "late Roman" and considered it given up by the end of the fifth century. Dörpfeld did not give a precise date either, but considered the fortress earlier than the Byzantine village and church. Adler, on the other hand, thought that the wall was built in 465–470 against the Vandals coming from the west, as part of a series of fortifications along the coast and Curtius was sure that it belonged to the reign of Justinian, who was in his opinion the first with a consistent project for fortifying Hellas. Not a single proposal is based on conclusive archaeological evidence, however.[21]

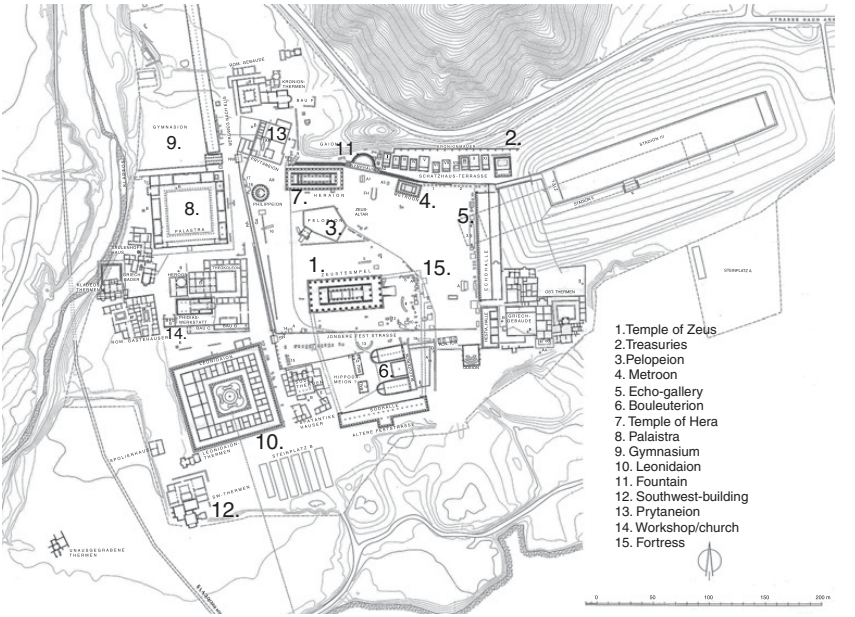
[19] Moretti 1957 has only four names of victors after 267: nos. 941–44.

[20] Sinn 1991: 367. Lehmann 2007b: 50–52 comes to similar conclusions.

[21] With the exception of Weil, who referred to sixth-century hoards of coins, which according to him postdated the abandonment of the fortress (which says little on its date of construction, however). See Boetticher 1883: 38; Adler *e.a.* 1897: 65 (Curtius), 91–92 (Dörpfeld), 95–96 (Adler), 125–26 (Weil).

Analysis of the purpose of the fortress pleads against a fifth-century date. The fortress was constructed inside the Altis, with the temple of Zeus as the only important building included, and consisted of a 240-m wall, on the average 3.0 to 3.5 m thick, with several small towers. At the time of the excavations, the wall stood 4 m high, but at the time of construction, it may have been as high as 10 m. For practical reasons, the outer walls of the Zeus temple and the southern gallery were incorporated in the fortress, but otherwise it was constructed very neatly: irregular debris of earlier buildings, such as drums, was used on the inside, while the outside was mostly constructed of regularly shaped stones. The magnitude and professional execution of the works exclude that it was meant only as a shelter for the local population and cattle in case of trouble.[22] It had to protect something more: either the entire region – if it formed part of a fortification network – or else the riches of Olympia. The former is unlikely. The general location near the sanctuary could of course be explained by the availability of building material, but the exact location within the area, namely at the foot of the Kronos hill, is too low from a strategic point of view. If the fortress were meant as a watch-post in a network of fortifications, it should have been built at the highest point. That it was nevertheless built at a low point, around the temple of Zeus, can only mean that it was meant to protect the temple site and/or the valuables stored there. There is an archaeological indication that the temple indeed had a museum-like function after the fortress was built: the location of statue bases indicates that certain statues were exhibited between the columns of the Zeus temple, but only on the open south side.[23] Yet in the fifth century, little was left to protect: the invaluable chryselephantine statue of Zeus, one of the seven wonders of the world, had been removed to Constantinople, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Until the later fourth or early fifth century, however, the sanctuary and temple could have held considerable wealth, which had to be protected against greedy invaders. Equally, the size of the fortress implies significant expenditure on labor and equipment and hence a considerable financial investment. Raising this kind of money on short notice may still have been possible for a famous pagan sanctuary in the third or early fourth century and perhaps as late as the reign of Julian, but later than this such an investment is hardly conceivable.

[22] This objection was raised by Adler in Adler *e.a.* 1897: 95; nevertheless, the proposal that the fortress was a fifth-century *Fluchtfestung* is repeated by Gutsfeld and Lehmann 2013b: 3, 11.
[23] Sinn 2004: 230; Auffarth 2009: 310, with an old excavation picture on 323.



Map 2 Map of the sanctuary at Olympia.

Archaeological evidence likewise supports an early date. The building material incorporates spolia from the Pelopeion, the Metroon, the Echo-gallery, two of the treasuries and the southern part and hall of the bouleuterion (Map 2).[24] The baths and guest-houses, the monumental fountain, the temples of Zeus and Hera, the palaistra and the gymnasium all escaped spoliation, even though some of these were located closer to the fortress than the buildings that were spoliated. That a drum for a column of the Zeus temple was found in the fortress wall with the grooves of the fluting not yet sculpted suggests, moreover, that the construction coincided with a restoration of the Zeus temple.[25] Traditionally, the ruinous state of the sanctuary after the construction of this fortress has been lamented and the continuation of the games considered difficult. It should be doubted, however, that the abandonment of the spoliated buildings had indeed such a strong effect. The treasuries had long lost their original function; several of them had in fact already disappeared by the end of the second

[24] Fullest description is Adler *e.a.* 1897: 95–96. Cf. Mallwitz 1972: 110, Hitzl 1991: 114.
[25] Mallwitz 1999: 25.

century.[26] The Metroon too had lost its function as a temple of the imperial cult: no new imperial statues were set up here after Titus.[27] All the necessary accommodation for an international athletic *agon* – the stadium for the competitions, the gymnasium for training, the baths and guest-houses for the athletes and the spectators, and the main temples for the cult – still survived. Only dispensable material was reused, in other words. This suggests that the wall was constructed when the games were still being held. It may even be dated before 300, since around that time the temple of Hera – which was not used for the fortress – collapsed in an earthquake and became available for spoliation. The normal occasion for the construction of a fortification is fear for an external threat, and the only threat between the archaeological *terminus post quem* of circa 260 and the logical *terminus ante quem* of the reign of Julian was indeed the Herulian invasion in 267.

This conclusion is now confirmed by a long-awaited study of the Leonidaion, the large luxury accommodations constructed in the fourth century BC, which were, at some point after a last renovation in the early third century, used as the main source of building material for the late-antique fortress. Although the main excavation took place in 1954–1956, the material and history of the building was not carefully studied and published until 2013, by Werner Fuchs. Of great interest to us is his examination of the water circuit of the peristylium, which filled up with debris after the abandonment of the edifice. Pieces of building material in this circuit clearly show that the debris is contemporary to the dismantling of the structure and hence the construction of the fortress. Several coins offer *termini post quem*: in the lowest layers of this debris, formed shortly after the abandonment, was found a coin of Gallienus; slightly higher one of Probus; and in the upper layers one of Diocletian.[28] The spoliation of the Leonidaion circa 265–300 for the construction of the fortress is entirely compatible with a project inspired by the Herulian invasion. It remains unlikely that Olympia was actually raided, however, as there are no archaeological or literary indications of this. The games continued to take place as usual. In 269, shortly after the Herulian invasion, the stadium race was won by Dionysios of Alexandria.[29]

[26] Mallwitz 1972: 179. In Delphi, the famous treasury of the Athenians even served as a place of business for pawnbrokers in the third and fourth centuries, see Weir 2004: 90.
[27] Hitzl 1991: 114. [28] Fuchs 2013: 321–25.
[29] Eusebius, *Chronica* App. (ed. Christesen and Martirosova-Torlone 2006) = FGrH 100 Fr. 2. The author of the appendix names as his source for this piece of information Dexippos, the Athenian historian and general who defeated the Herulians in Attica.

An earthquake in the reign of Diocletian, which seriously damaged several buildings, probably had a stronger effect on the organization of the games than the construction of the fortress. The eastern baths were not rendered functional again, but were instead turned into a storage room.[30] The baths north of the *prytaneion* were restored, but the attached *Speisepavillon* fell out of use.[31] The roof of the Hera temple collapsed and buried the famous Hermes of Praxiteles. The cella was patched up so that the cult could go on, but the temple itself was never restored.[32] Thus, from the late third century on, the northwestern side of the sanctuary lay partly in ruins, but the visual effect of these ruins should not be overestimated. The attention of the visitors was probably drawn to the large new fortification, which could parallel the great new walls in Athens. The statue of Zeus within these walls was still a famous sight.[33]

The rest of the sanctuary was, moreover, still bustling with activity. Most of the damage was quickly repaired.[34] The eastern gallery of the gymnasium was restored under Diocletian and some small rooms were added to the palaistra, constructed from reused blocks from the Hera temple.[35] The southern room of the southwest building underwent major changes.[36] Visitors continued to be well cared for: they had the choice between at least four different bath-houses, often with kitchen facilities.[37] Unfortunately, some of these were on the southwest side of the sanctuary, which frequently flooded after the walls on the banks of the Kladeos were breached in the mid fourth century.[38] The works and upkeep must have been a financial burden, but Olympia still attracted guests and athletes who stimulated the local economy. That a just governor received an honorary inscription in the fourth century suggests interest or support from the provincial level.[39] Perhaps Elis even enjoyed exemption from some provincial taxes.[40]

[30] Kunze *e.a.* 1994: 25. [31] Sinn 1992: 77–79. [32] Mallwitz 1972: 114–15.
[33] Julian, *Or.* 3.4 (no. Budé), from circa 355–360.
[34] For restorations to the Theokoleon and the southern baths, see Mallwitz 1972: 115, 245. Some repairs to the lion-head gargoyles of the Zeus temple may also date from the reign of Diocletian, see Willemsen 1959: 122–24.
[35] Mallwitz 1972: 114, 284, 289. [36] Kyrieleis 2003: 37.
[37] The southern baths (Mallwitz 1972: 109, 245–46), the baths north of the *prytaneion* (Sinn 1992: 79), the new baths near the Leonidaion (Sinn *e.a.* 1993–1996), and the Kladeos baths (Kunze and Schleif 1944: 95–96).
[38] Fuchs 2013: 330.
[39] IvO 481. Dates for this inscription range from the third to the fifth century. Due to its late-antique style (verse, letter forms, accentuation) the third century seems too early, and because of the reference to Zeus, the fifth seems unlikely as well. For the identification of the honorand as a governor see Robert 1948: 20.
[40] Julian, *Ep.* 198 (no. Budé).

This picture of continuity is further confirmed by a remarkable recent discovery. In 1994, archaeologists found a bronze plate about 75 cm high and 40 cm wide and inscribed with names of twenty Olympic victors (Fig. 1), stuck in the pipe of a latrine in the so-called southwest building, a luxurious villa-like structure adapted to the training needs of athletes.[41]

Originally the plate was somewhat larger, but to fit in the pipe, which it was apparently intended to block, the top and part of the left side had been cut off.

The twenty names were inscribed at various moments over perhaps 300 years, in about fourteen different hands. One of the first four names, which are neatly written in two columns, is dated to Olympiad 188, that is 28 BC. The palaeography, however, suggests that these names were inscribed in the imperial period.[42] The following name in the left-hand column is Ti. Claudius Rufus, a well-known athlete from the time of Tiberius. Underneath are the names of four athletes who cannot be dated. Ebert suggests these might be from the second century, but his only indication is the *nomen* Aelius, of which only the lambda is legible, for two of them. They are definitely earlier than the names in the right-hand column, however, as they are written somewhat more neatly, perhaps not perfectly straight, but small and tentatively following the style of the first four names. All other names on the plate date from the fourth century. In the right-hand column are M. Aur. Marcianus from Sardis, victorious in the *pankration* for boys in 321; M. Aur. Kallon from Thespiae in the *dolichos* for men in 333; M. Aur. Stratonikos from Tenedos in the *diaulos* for men, and Epiktetos in the '*trias*' (i.e. *stadion, diaulos*, and race-in-armor) for men, both in 337.[43] To the

[41] SEG XLV 412. This SEG entry takes over the preliminary edition by Ebert in 1997. Unfortunately Ebert died in 1999 before finishing the announced full edition. The task was passed on to Peter Herrmann, who also died before he was able to produce an edition. Cf. Wallner 2008: 90 n. 12.

[42] Ebert 1997: 223.

[43] Ebert (1997: 223 n. 9), an expert on the *pentathlon*, proposes an alternative interpretation of the rare term *trias*: Epictetus won the first three competitions of the *pentathlon* (the fourth and fifth were no longer organized if one athlete had won the first three). The word τριάς is extremely rare in this context, however. I (and Pleket 1999: 284) have found only one text with the words τριάς and πένταθλον in close proximity: I.Kition 2048 (= SEG XXX 1616), 2–3: [– – – πέν]ταθλον τριάδας π[ρώτας– – – –]ν ὁπλείτην. As the length of the missing parts is unknown, the meaning of this passage is uncertain. Τριάδας can either belong with [πέν]ταθλον – unlikely, as one would then expect the latter to be in the genitive – or with the events in the next lacuna. Still rare, but at least several times attested, is 'τριάστης'. Eusebius, *Chronica* Ol. 175 (ed. Christesen and Martirosova-Torlone 2006) calls Leonidas from Rhodes 'τριάστης' and according to Philostratus, *Gymnasticus* 33, this same athlete was famous for winning the *stadion, diaulos*, and race-in-armor in one Olympiad. The *stadion* and *diaulos* could have been mentioned before ὁπλείτην in I.Kition 2048. Therefore, the better explanation of τριάς is a victory in these three events. Wallner 2008: 92–93 suggests that the race-in-armor no longer existed after the second century, but his *argumentum e silentio* is in contradiction with I.Kition 2048 (3rd c.) and with early fourth-century mosaics (see p. 161 below and Fig. 6).

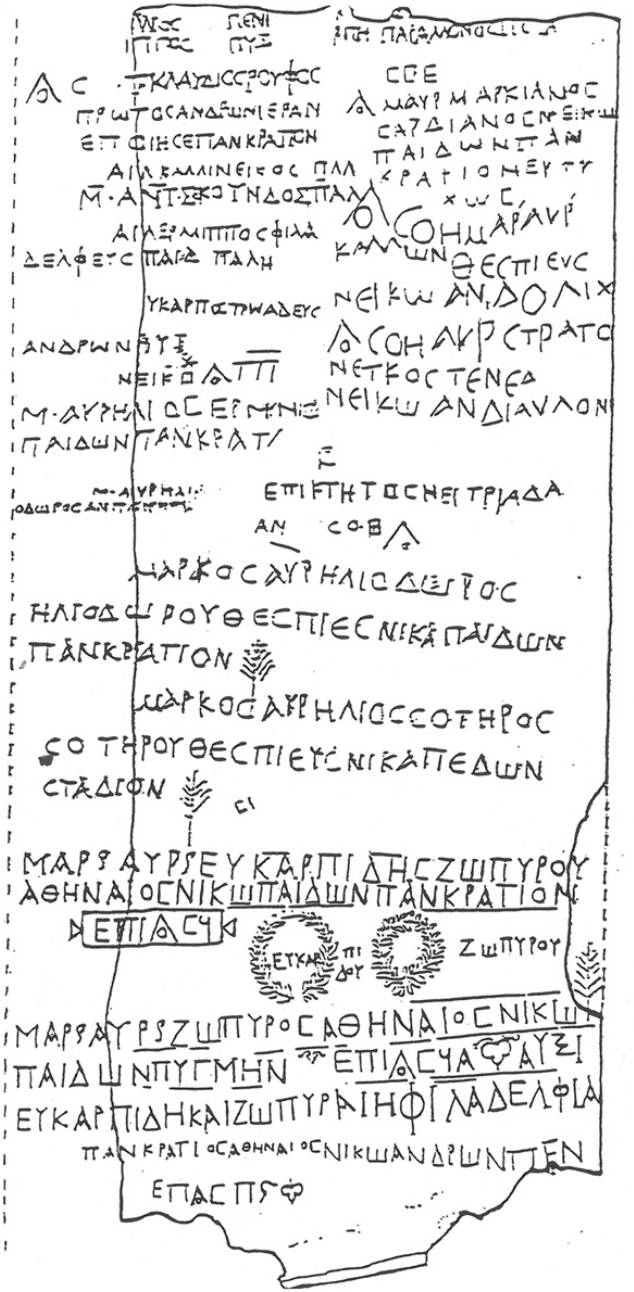


Figure 1 Drawing of the victor list inscribed on a bronze plate at Olympia (late fourth century).

left-hand column were added M. Aur. Hermenios, victorious in the *pankration* (for boys?) in 341 and M. Aur. Heliodoros, who probably won the *pankration* in one of the following Olympiads. His entry is hard to read, as it is squeezed into the limited space left by Epiktetos and Hermenios. The last five names use the entire width of the plate: first another M. Aur. Heliodoros, from Thespiae, in the *pankration* for boys and his fellow citizen M. Aur. Soteros in the *stadion* (?) for boys, who both won in unknown Olympiads between 345 and 377; then two Athenian brothers, namely M. Aur. Eukarpides, victorious in the *pankration* for boys in 381, and his brother Zopyros, in the boxing for boys in 385. Another Athenian, Pankratios, victor in 381 in the *pentathlon* for men, is added after the brothers.

The purpose of this bronze plate is mysterious. It has been suggested that it was a victor list of an athletic guild, on the hypothesis that the southwest building housed the Olympic headquarters of such an association.[44] There are, however, several problems with this theory. Firstly, officials of the famous international athletic association would have been present at Olympia only for a maximum of two months every four years, and this cannot account for such luxurious facilities. If this association had local headquarters in Greece – which is by no means certain – these would be expected in Corinth or Athens: that is in a large city visited by the athletes more than once during an Olympiad and situated on the main traveling routes so as to enable easy communication. It is of course possible that some officials resided at the southwest building during their stay at Olympia, but even that does not explain the particular composition of the list: as it is neither complete nor systematic, the list does not have an obviously official character. In fact nothing seems to connect these athletes: not their specialty, neither the year in which they won, nor their provenance. The different hands do not all look professional. In the fourth century the names were often combined with νικῶ, in the first person. This suggests that at least these names were something like autographs, even if the athletes may not have done the actual engraving. Perhaps it was a guest-list of the athletic facilities where it was found, signed by guests who had obtained a victory, and exhibited in a public room. That some cities recur several times could then be explained by countrymen traveling together and giving newcomers tips about 'where to stay in Olympia'. The fourth-century names were apparently recorded after the plate had not been used

[44] Kyrieleis 2003: 20–21, following the hypothesis of Sinn 1992: 79–84, Sinn *e.a.* 1994: 231–41, and Sinn 1998. The bronze plate is also used as the main evidence for this identification of the building, however. Pleket 1999: 282–83 has rightly expressed reservations about this circular argument.

for a long time. Perhaps an early fourth-century manager of these facilities thought that his VIP guest-list would look more impressive if he recycled an old bronze plate with names of ancient victors?

This exceptional find has at once multiplied the number of victors known for the fourth century by six. Before this only two fourth-century victors were known: Philoumenos from Philadelphia, victor in one or several of the combat sports, possibly in 369 and/or 373[45], and the Armenian prince Varazdates, who won the boxing competition around the same time – that is, when he was living at the court in Constantinople. All the new victors from the bronze plate originate from Greece or Asia Minor. This could suggest a certain regionalization and growing difficulty in attracting international athletes, but in fact the sample is too small to be representative. The even spread of the victories over the fourth century clearly discredits the traditional view that many celebrations of the Olympics were canceled after the third century.

The end of the Olympics is traditionally dated to 393.[46] This date refers to an anti-pagan constitution of Theodosius I, which does not actually mention the Olympics. The idea of nonetheless connecting it to these games was inspired by the dubious testimony of the eleventh-century Kedrenos, who placed the event in the reign of Theodosius I, and is based on the presumption that the end of the *agones* must have been the result of a religious law. Why these presumptions are, in my view, wrong

[45] Philoumenos: Eusebius, *Chronica* App. (ed. Christesen and Martirosova-Torlone 2006) and CIL VI 10154. On Varazdates, Moses Chorenensis, an Armenian historian, perhaps from the eighth century, writes in his *History of the Armenians* 3.40: "But the well-deserving Augustus Theodosius, called the Great, in his twentieth year made king of Armenia in succession to Pap a certain Varazdat, from the same Arsacid family. This Varazdat was young in years, spirited, personable, strong, full of all deeds of valor, and very expert at archery. Earlier he had fled from Shapuh to the emperor's court and had become a noted champion – first by winning the pugilistic contest at Pisa; and then at Heliopolis in Hellas at midday he had killed lions, for which he was praised and honored by the contestants at the Olympic games" (translation from Thomson 1978). Other sources show that the death of Pap and the succession of Varazdates took place in 374. Moses was well acquainted with Greek literature translated in Armenian and was particularly influenced by the Alexander Romance, from which he took striking phrases and even complete episodes. Thomson 1978: 24–25 therefore thinks that Varazdates' Olympic victory was inspired by Alexander's participation in the horse races and the unlikely anecdote of the lions by the lion-killing of Poulydamas in Eusebius, *Chronica* Ol. 93 (ed. Christesen and Martirosova-Torlone 2006). As the story of Alexander in the Romance is actually quite different – Alexander expressly refuses to compete in the athletic competitions – the historicity of Varazdates' victory should not be denied immediately, though caution is in order.

[46] References collected in Weiler 2004: 54–57. Usually, this date is connected to *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.10–12, e.g. Teja 1991. Some have presumed an unpreserved, specific law, e.g. Biscardi 1981: 373. Recently, Gutsfeld and Lehmann 2003, Fargnoli 2003, and Weiler 2004 have all, independently from each other, argued against this date and (except for Fargnoli) against the idea of an imperial abolition.

will be discussed in Chapters 8 and 9. Here I will deal only with evidence concerning the Olympics specifically.

Kedrenos wrote: "In the same period the festival of the Olympiads, which took place every four years, came to an end. This festival had begun when Manasses ruled the Jews and was preserved until the reign of the same Theodosius the Great. And the indictions started to be counted, which had begun under Augustus Caesar in the fifteenth year of his reign. The victory near Actium gave its name to the indictions, i.e. inactians."[47] 'The same period' refers to the preceding passage, in which Theodosius, urged on by Ambrose, gives clemency to the Christians who had set fire to the synagogue of Constantinople. Fargnoli has demonstrated that this date for the end of the Olympics cannot be trusted, as in the supposedly contemporary story about the synagogue, Kedrenos conflates information from letters of Ambrose, or from his biography by Paulinus, regarding the fire of the synagogue of Callinicum along the Euphrates in 388, with information, possibly from Georgius Monachius, on the destruction of the synagogue of Constantinople in the reign of Theodosius II.[48]

The passage on the indictions is plain nonsense. Indictions were not used as a chronological unit until the fourth century, and had nothing to do with the Actian games. Moreover, Olympiads did not stop being used as a unit of time when the games came to an end. This dating practice, promoted by Hellenistic historiographers because the Olympiads superseded local systems of time-reckoning, was not common in histories of the imperial period. When used, numbered Olympiads replaced references to *stadion* victors. Olympiad dating was, however, appreciated by Christian chroniclers, for whom this was once again a useful instrument to compare different systems of time-reckoning. In the Byzantine period, the Olympiads therefore continued to be counted, irrespective of the fact that the games had ended.[49]

[47] Kedrenos, *Compendium Historiarum* (PG 121) 573 (i.e. 623 D – 624 A): Ἐν τούτοις ἥ τε τῶν Ὀλυμπιάδων ἀπέσβη πανήγυρις, ἥτις κατὰ τετραετῆ χρόνον ἐπετελεῖτο. ἤρξατο δὲ ἡ τοιαύτη πανήγυρις ὅτε Μανασσῆς τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐβασίλευσε, καὶ ἐφυλάττετο ἕως τῆς ἀρχῆς αὐτοῦ μεγάλου Θεοδοσίου. καὶ ἤρξαντο ἀριθμεῖσθαι αἱ ἴνδικτοι, ἀρξάμεναι ἀπὸ Αὐγούστου Καίσαρος ἐν ἔτει ιε΄ τῆς ἀρχῆς αὐτοῦ. καλεῖται δὲ ἰνδικτιών, τουτέστιν ἰνακτιών, ἡ περὶ τὸ Ἄκτιον νίκη.

[48] Fargnoli 2003: 123–29.

[49] For the genre of the Olympiad chronographies and chronicles see Christesen 2007: 228–347. The list of *stadion* victors by Eusebius, complete until 217, was an appendix to his chronicle; in the chronicle itself he used only Olympiad numbers. The general absence of victor names in histories of the imperial age explains why the list does not reach Eusebius' own lifetime, although the games were still held at the time: he had to use an existing compilation, which he could not complement himself on the basis of easily available works. For Byzantine Olympiads see for example the *Chronicon Paschale*.

Another reason to be suspicious of Kedrenos' date can be found in a panegyric of 399, that is in the reign of Arcadius and Honorius. Claudian expresses here his hope that the athletes who have won victories at the Olympic and Isthmian games will come to Rome to celebrate the new consul.[50] Though the language is poetic, the assumption that the games still existed would have been out of place if the games had been abolished six years earlier.

There are several indications that the games instead came to an end in the reign of Theodosius II (408–450). Not only did Kedrenos' source on the destruction of the synagogue in Constantinople discuss this reign, but there are also two scholia on Lucian that connect the end of the Olympics to a fire in the temple under Theodosius II: "The Olympic games . . . existed for a long time until Theodosius the younger, who was the son of Arcadius. After the temple of Olympian Zeus had been burnt down, the festival of the Eleans and the Olympic contest were abandoned."[51] This fire has in turn been interpreted as ordered by the emperor on the presumption that the emperor actively promoted the end of the games, and therefore it has been connected to precisely dated edicts from his reign (e.g. 426 and 435).[52] The scholia do not say that Theodosius II was behind the fire, however. Even a small accidental fire could have been a final blow for the sanctuary if no benefactor were found to pay for the restorations.

In the reign of Theodosius II, the famous statue of Zeus was, moreover, removed from Olympia and set up in Constantinople. Kedrenos lists the "ivory Zeus of Pheidias" among several famous classical statues that in the fifth century stood in the quarter of Lausos.[53] He inserts this after the death

[50] Claudian, *Panegyricus de Consulatu Flavii Manlii Theodori* 288–290: *Calliope, liquidas Alciden posce palaestras / cuncta Palaemoniis manus explorata coronis / adsit et Eleo pubes laudata tonanti*. "Kalliope, ask Alkides for the oily wrestlers. Make sure that the whole company tested for the crowns of Palaemon and the young men praised by the Elean thunderer are present." This passage appears in a long section about the many shows appropriate for the celebration of the new consul. Alkides is a poetic name for Herakles, patron of the palaistra and athletic training. The sea god Palaemon was honored with the Isthmian games, the Elean thunderer refers to the Olympian Zeus.

[51] *Scholia in Lucianum* (in the Teubner edition of Lucian) 41.9.9–11: Ὀλυμπιάδας· [. . .] καὶ διήρκεσεν ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τῶν καθ' Ἑβραίους κριτῶν μέχρι τοῦ μικροῦ Θεοδοσίου· ἐμπρησθέντος γὰρ τοῦ ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ ναοῦ ἐξέλιπε καὶ ἡ τῶν Ἠλείων πανήγυρις; 41–46: ἀρξάμενος δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐποχῆς καθ' Ἑβραίους ἐπ' Ἰάειρον ἐνά [. . .] διήρκεσε μέχρι τοῦ μικροῦ Θεοδοσίου, ὃς Ἀρκαδίου υἱὸς ἦν, τῶν χρόνων. τοῦ δὲ ναοῦ τοῦ Ὀλυμπίου Διὸς ἐμπρησθέντος ἐξέλιπε καὶ ἡ τῶν Ἠλείων πανήγυρις καὶ ὁ ἀγὼν ὁ Ὀλυμπικός. Only the end of the second scholion is translated above.

[52] A list of authors is given by Weiler 2004: 61–62. The often found date of 426 (November 13) for an edict on the destruction of pagan temples goes back to Adler (Adler *e.a.* 1897: 94), who does not give a reference; for 435 (November 14) see Fargnoli 2003: 131–33, who connects this with *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.25. Possibly, Adler meant the same edict, but dated it wrong, since this is the only edict on temples promulgated in mid-November.

[53] Kedrenos, *Compendium Historiarum* (PG 121) 564 (i.e. 613 B).

of Theodosius I, but as Lausos was a eunuch at the court of Theodosius II, his statue collection must date from that reign. Lausos reached the height of his wealth and power in 420, when he was appointed chief chamberlain. He had already been replaced by 422, but possibly regained the position in the 430s. The removal of the statue of Zeus should be dated to his period of power, in the 420s or the 430s, as the project could only have been undertaken with imperial permission and would have been expensive: a crew of specialized workmen would have had to be employed for several weeks, to dismantle the giant statue, catalogue the parts, transport them to the capital, and reconstruct it there.[54] It is unlikely that the games continued long after the removal of the statue. It was not the cult statue, but it was the archetypical image of Zeus and one of the prime attractions of Olympia.[55]

In the fifth century Olympia became a Christian town, perhaps after a short period of abandonment. The workshop of Pheidias was turned into a church in the mid fifth century; the first Christian layers are separated from the earlier strata by silt from a flood of the Kladeos.[56] The accommodations for athletes and guests were at this point no longer used for their original purpose.[57] Blocks from the gymnasium gate, and perhaps from the palaistra too, and statue bases from the nymphaion were reused in the church.[58] The baths near the Leonidaion were turned into a wine cellar and in the building north of the *prytaneion*, there was a workshop for lamps. The local community mostly made its living from agriculture.[59] Christian graves have been found in several abandoned buildings.[60] The Church owned at least a part of the surrounding lands.[61] It is not clear who took the lead in this transition process: it was probably the local population and the city of Elis, including the local clergy, but the government could have had some role, depending on how much of the land around Olympia was temple land.[62]

[54] Stevenson 2007: esp. 72–79. Cf. Bassett 2004: 42–44 about the practical aspects of statue collecting in Constantinople, and 98–120 about the Lausos collection.
[55] Robertson Brown 2006: 316.
[56] Sinn 1997: 216.
[57] The southwest building and the Kladeos baths were abandoned circa 400, see Sinn *e.a.* 1994: 234 and Kunze and Schleif 1944: 95–96.
[58] Adler *e.a.* 1892: 97, 123; Bol 1984: 101–04.
[59] Zoumbaki 2001: 55–56. A more general description of this village in Sinn 2004: 228–29.
[60] E.g. in the palaistra (Mallwitz 1972: 114), the southwest building (Kyrieleis 2003: 33), and the eastern baths (Kunze *e.a.* 1994: 21). IvO 811 is a Christian funeral inscription.
[61] Zoumbaki 2001: 55 on the basis of IvO 656.
[62] Temple land was confiscated by the state, agonothetic land was administered by the cities. Cf. the analysis of *Cod. Iust.* 11.62.14 on pp. 301ff. below. Gutsfeld and Lehmann 2003: 151; 2013b: 10–16 propose that it was the state that turned Olympia into a domain farmed by tenants.

It has recently been suggested that the Olympic games continued in this Christian village after the reign of Theodosius II, on the basis of three arguments: that the stadium was not built over like other parts of the sanctuary; that the most recent layer of the stadium contained coins and small objects from the fifth century; and that the Olympic games in Antioch continued until 520 with an 'Elean license'.[63] This suggestion is not convincing, however. The idea of an Elean license is based on a misinterpretation of John Malalas, as I have argued elsewhere.[64] That the Christian villagers did not build over the stadium was no doubt due to the fact that, unlike in other parts of the sanctuary, there was no ready building material available here, since the Olympic stadium never had stone seating. The presence of small objects actually confirms that the racetrack was no longer maintained,[65] as normally trash was removed from the track so that the barefoot athletes would not hurt themselves. The objects indeed show that the stadium was used, but not that it was used for athletics. Such a large flat terrain would have been suitable for many activities, such as village feasts or agriculture.

In the mid sixth century, the Byzantine village suffered from natural disasters. After a first earthquake, some simple huts seem to have been reconstructed, but they were abandoned again soon after. The latest datable antique objects in Olympia are coins from the reign of Justin II (565–578), and perhaps one copper coin from the reign of Phokas (602–610).[66] Recent geomorphical and geoarcheological research suggests that in the later sixth century repeated tsunamis traveled considerable distances inland in the region of Elis and covered the site of Olympia with a thick layer of sediments, which for almost 1300 years hid the sanctuary from sight until the nineteenth-century excavations again revealed it.[67]

The rest of the *periodos*: the Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean games

The *periodos* By analogy with the Olympics, the three other contests of the *periodos* are traditionally considered to have ended in 393 as well, on the basis of the unproven assumption that this was the result of a general prohibition. As in the case of the symbolic number one, only a rough

[63] Sinn 2002: 373 and 2004: 32. Sinn refers for this idea to Völling, who unfortunately died in 2000, before the publication of the announced studies.
[64] Remijsen 2010a: 429–31. [65] Kunze and Schleif 1938: 18–19; Kunze 1961: 23.
[66] Mallwitz 1999: 161.
[67] See the press release of the Eastern Ionian Sea Tsunami Project of the Johannes Gutenberg Universität in Mainz: www.uni-mainz.de/eng/14389.php.

estimate for the date of their demise can be found in the late-antique evidence, but for none of them is the last decade of the fourth century a likely option. Before we start re-examining the late-antique evidence for these three contests, it should be observed that we may in fact even misrepresent late-antique reality by discussing these four games separately from the other contests. Like most technical terms of Greek athletics, the word '*periodos*' is largely known from inscriptions, and thus disappears out of sight in the late third century. There are some indications that the concept lost meaning soon afterwards. A papyrus from 298 contains the last attestation of the title *periodonikes*.[68] A law from the reign of Diocletian limited certain athletic privileges to victors of three sacred games, of which at least one had to be in Rome or in ancient Greece (*vel semel Romae seu antiquae Graeciae*).[69] Although it is attractive to interpret this stipulation as reflecting the prestige of the old *periodos* in Greece and of the Italian 'new *periodos*', these technical terms are absent, not only in the codified version of the sixth century, but in a fourth-century copy on papyrus as well.[70] Instead, the formulation encompassed not only the 'big four', but all games in Achaea (or at least those with a long tradition, if that is what is meant by '*antiqua Graecia*') combined with all the games in Rome, but not the *Sebasta, Eusebeia*, or *Aktia*, which used to enjoy the same prestige. Even if the athletes still thought in terms of the *periodos* when this law was promulgated, its new definition of top contests would have stimulated the athletes to think no longer in terms of the old top four.

Possibly the latest source on *agones* mentioning all four games of the *periodos* in one breath is the 'letter on behalf of the Argives' included in a manuscript collection of Julianic letters: "There are four great and splendid *agones* in Greece, as we know. The Eleans organize the *Olympia*, the Delphians the *Pythia*, the Corinthians the games on the Isthmus, and the Argives the feast of the *Nemea*."[71] This passage comes from a letter of recommendation carried by Argive ambassadors to a high Roman official, most likely the governor of Greece. Their mission was to ask for exemption for the city of Argos from the obligatory contribution (408a–b: συντελεῖν αὐτοῖς ἀναγκάζουσι) paid by many cities (409a: πολλῶν πόλεων) for the regular organization of *venationes* in Corinth (409a: τὰ κυνηγέσια τὰ

[68] P.Oxy. XIV 1643. [69] *Cod. Iust*. 10.54.1.

[70] The connection to the old and new *periodos* is suggested by Wallner 2007: 141. For the Italian and Epirote games in the περίοδος τέλεια see Gouw 2009: 144–46. The copy on papyrus is P.Lips. I 44.

[71] Julian, *Ep*. 198 (no. Budé = 28 in Loeb), 408b: Τεττάρων γὰρ ὄντων, ὡς ἴσμεν, τῶν μεγίστων καὶ λαμπροτάτων ἀγώνων περὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, Ἠλεῖοι μὲν Ὀλύμπια, Δελφοὶ δὲ Πύθια, καὶ τὰ ἐν Ἰσθμῷ Κορίνθιοι, Ἀργεῖοι δὲ τὴν τῶν Νεμέων συγκροτοῦσι πανήγυριν.

πολλάκις ἐν τοῖς θεάτροις). Most scholars reject Julianic authorship for this letter, because the attribution to Julian in the manuscript is not confirmed by any internal elements: the author never refers to his own authority, nor is his style considered as elegant as the (future) emperor's.[72] Who did write the letter is of little importance for the present discussion. The date, on the contrary, is highly relevant for the validity of the information. As the letter is relevant to all contests of the *periodos*, the issue of its date needs to be dealt with first.

While some scholars accept a Julianic date, others prefer a date in the later first or early second century. The idea of an early date, sparked by the passage explaining that Corinth based its claims on being a Roman colony (409c–d: ἐπειδὴ τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν ἀποικίαν ἐδέξαντο), was first argued by Keil in 1913, but did not find general acceptance. In 1994, Spawforth tried to find a wider consensus by proposing precise circumstances in which the letter could have been written: a dispute over the tribute for the imperial cult in Corinth organized by the Achaean League since AD 54. Although Spawforth's arguments that the letter could potentially be placed in an early second-century context are generally convincing, neither he nor Keil has proved beyond doubt that the letter cannot fit a fourth-century context.

Keil uses only vague stylistic arguments for his early date, which were already refuted by Maas in the same year.[73] Spawforth's first argument is that the refoundation of Corinth as a Roman colony in 44 BC was presented as a relatively "recent" event (409c: ἔναγχος). Yet the use of historical arguments is common in imperial-age Greek literature, and the more ancient the better: in the same letter, the status of Argos is linked to its role in the Trojan war and, in addition to these 'ἀρχαῖα', as place of origin of the Macedonian kings. In comparison to such claims, the colony status of Corinth was always relatively recent, whether the letter was written in the first or in the fourth century. Moreover, the word ἔναγχος was clearly intended to present Corinth's claim as more trivial than that of the Argives, not to give an exact dating. Secondly, Spawforth argues that the survival of the three Nemean contests into the reign of Julian is unlikely. As it is exactly the purpose of this study to determine how long the games survived, this cannot be accepted as a given. Thirdly, Spawforth identifies

[72] *Status quaestionis* in Spawforth 1994: 211. The last to argue that it was Julian himself who wrote the letter was Vollgraff 1945: 13–29.

[73] Keil 1913; Maas 1913: 534.

one of the ambassadors, Lamprias, with a known notable from the first century. Lamprias was not, however, a rare name.[74]

In reaction to Keil, Maas had previously used the manuscript history to argue in favor of a fourth-century date.[75] This key argument remains standing: the other incorrect attributions in this manuscript collection are all somehow connected to Julian or to sophists from the same age. That a letter of unremarkable style and content and unknown authorship was preserved for 300 years and eventually ended up in a collection of Julianic letters is extremely unlikely, and is difficult to accept as long as a fourth-century date cannot be ruled out.

The dispute concerning Argos' contribution fits, in fact, very well in the fourth-century context of increasing provincial control over the organization of games (see also Chapter 12). That not the province but the city of Corinth is presented as the wrongdoer by Argos is understandable, since it is the provincial governor whom the Argives are trying to convince. A close parallel to the situation in Greece is found in an imperial rescript of 372 to the proconsul of Asia, about, among other games, the *venationes* organized by the asiarch in Ephesus and paid for by liturgists from across the province. Interestingly, the emperors refer in the introduction of this rescript, which is probably later than the pseudo-Julianic letter, to the prefecture of Illyricum (including Achaea) as an exemplary region for the provincial organization of games.[76] *Venationes* were furthermore far more popular in the fourth than in the first or early second century.[77] They are particularly well attested in provincial capitals for the fourth century (e.g. besides Ephesus also Antioch and Aphrodisias).[78] Admittedly, the letter does not state literally that the *venationes* in Corinth represented games of the province. Argos had to pay because it was "attached" by Rome (408a: προσγενομένην ... ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλευούσης πόλεως) to Corinth. It is not explained what kind of attachment is envisaged, nor is it explicitly mentioned which were all the other contributing cities, but it is mentioned that besides Elis in the Peloponnese, also Delphi in Boeotia was exempted (408b: οὔτε τὴν Δελφῶν οὔτε τὴν Ἠλείων ἀτέλειαν). Indeed, this points to a significant flaw in Spawforth's

[74] Spawforth 1994: 213–14. [75] Maas 1913: 534.

[76] IK Ephesos 43, discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

[77] There are only few attestations of such games in the first century (Robert 1940: 264–66). In the early Empire, *venationes* were often combined with gladiatorial shows (Robert 1940: 309–10), but these came to an end in the course of the fourth century, while *venationes* continued at least until the sixth century (Wiedemann 1995: 145). The fourth-century *venationes* in Libanius, for example, are never accompanied by gladiatorial shows. See Liebeschuetz 1959: 124.

[78] For Antioch see Libanius, *Ep.* 1399–1400. Cf. Liebeschuetz 1959: 116–26. For Aphrodisias see the reconstruction of the stadium into an amphitheater about 400, see Welch 1998.

reconstruction: why would Delphi be specifically exempted from tribute paid by the Achaean League, to which it did not belong?[79] Delphi did belong to the late-antique province Achaea, however. Therefore, the letter should be accepted as evidence for the reign of Julian, or at least the broader mid-fourth century.

The Pythian games Despite the possible disappearance of the concept of the *periodos* in the fourth century, the Pythian games retained their status, remaining second only to the Olympics. These two contests are repeatedly named together in late-antique agonistic metaphors,[80] and it is on the ground of the pre-eminence of its games that Delphi is said, in the letter from the Julianic collection, to have been exempted from contributions for the provincial games in Corinth.[81] The city, which had gradually taken over the responsibilities of the amphictyony as organizer of the games, was a busy town in late antiquity.[82] There are multiple indications of late-antique activity in the sanctuary of Apollo. Although Constantine removed works of art from Delphi to Constantinople, for example ancient tripods,[83] his reign was also a time of construction projects in the city. The Roman agora in the southeastern corner of the sanctuary, just outside the sacred domain, was aggrandized with a new wall, shops, and porticoes, and was decorated with imperial statues of Constantine and his sons. Marble drums and capitals from the *xystos* were reused in the porticoes, but this spoliation did not render the training facilities unusable. Shortly before 319, new baths were constructed, which were in fact the first luxury baths in the sanctuary.[84] Evidently, the sanctuary and the games still flourished in the first half of the fourth century.

For the second half of the century, there are no clear archaeological indications of restorations. Circa 364–367 statues of Valens and Valentinian I were added to the agora, however, and in an inscription on the base the Delphians honored the emperors as benefactors, which may imply that they had offered some financial support, though this does not have to be connected to the games.[85] Both the stadium and the gymnasium stayed clear of debris until well into the fifth century, which suggests that

[79] Spawforth 1994: 221 admits this immunity is a "red herring", but does not attempt to explain it.
[80] E.g. John Cassian, *Instituta* (SC 109) 5.12; Julian, *Or.* 3.26 (no. Budé); Themistius, *Or.* 3.41c.
[81] Julian, *Ep.* (no. Budé) 198, 408b on the exemption.
[82] Weir 2004: 50–58, esp. 53 n. 325, on the importance of the *damiourgoi* of Delphi in the Constantinian age. For Delphi in late antiquity see Petridis 2009: 101–04.
[83] Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 3.54.
[84] Weir 2004: 80 (n. 529), 95–97, 102–104. For the monuments for the emperors see also Vatin 1962.
[85] Inscription published in Vatin 1962: 241.

they were still in use in the early fifth century at least.[86] In the sixth century, a church was built above the palaistra.[87]

In 424, the citizens of Delphi complained to the emperor that they were compelled to present shows in Constantinople, although they had no means to cover more than the liturgies in their own city. The emperor reacted favorably to their request and removed the compulsion:[88] "The report of Your Sublimity shows that the property of the municipal council of Delphi has often been exhausted by new kinds of losses. Therefore, by orders sent to all the municipalities and judges of Illyricum, you shall make known to all that no person at all shall be compelled to present the usual spectacles to the people of the Eternal City, but that every citizen shall fulfill the duties of his accustomed devotion within his own municipality." Delphi's fourth-century privileges concerning the provincial games in Corinth had apparently not been extended to the games in Constantinople, or were not respected by the later governors. Though it does not prove anything, the constitution at least suggests that the Pythian games still existed in 424.[89] The emperor exempted all citizens of the prefecture of Illyricum from the compulsion to present shows in the capital and did not specify for which local liturgy they had to use the money instead. Considering that the sports infrastructure was still in use at this date, it is significant, however, that the citizens of Delphi in particular were under such financial pressure that they took the initiative to complain. The most logical explanation for these particularly heavy local liturgies is that Delphi was still organizing its own games. The imperial exemption, meant to mitigate the financial pressure, seems to have worked only temporarily, however. At some point in the fifth century, the entrance to the stadium was narrowed, so that it could easily be closed off and used as a pasture for cattle.[90] These changes may point to a date in the second or possibly even third quarter of the fifth century for the end of the games.

The Isthmian games The *Isthmia*, organized by the provincial capital Corinth, continued into the fourth century as well. At that time, athletes were apparently still ardent to win here: a fourth-century lead tablet

[86] Aupert 1979: 139–40; Weir 2004: 97, 101. [87] Robertson Brown 2006, 312.

[88] *Cod. Theod.* 15.5.4 (424 apr. 22): *Imp. Theodosius a. Isidoro praefecto Illyrici. Delforum curiae facultates novis damnis frequenter adtritas relatio tui culminis intimavit. Ideoque praeceptis ad universas Illyrici civitates iudicesque transmissis notum omnibus faciat nullum penitus spectacula oportere sollemnia urbis aeternae populis exhibere, sed unumquemque civium intra propriam civitatem debere solitae devotionis officia, prout patrimonii sui vires patiuntur, implere, gravissimae poenae interminatione proposita non solum contra eos, qui huiusmodi functiones crediderint exigendas, sed etiam contra ordinarios ubique rectores*. Translation adapted from Pharr 1952: 432.

[89] As suggested in Lehmann 2007a: 69. [90] Aupert 1979: 140.

cursing four runners has been discovered in a well in the sanctuary.[91] According to Themistius and Claudian, the games were still held at the very end of the century.[92]

The excavations at the site offer a mixed picture. From the mid third century on, material such as potsherds and coins clearly decreases in the area of the temple and the stadium, but it is not certain whether this decrease should be explained by decline or by erosion of the site. The cult of Poseidon certainly still existed in the mid fourth century.[93] There does seem to have been a problem of bad maintenance, particularly in the theater. In the later third century, rubbish started to fill a pit in the *parodos* and the drains, which should have been cleaned regularly to prevent flooding. Other fourth-century material suggests that the building was still in use, but it is doubtful that it could still function properly as a theater. In the southeast of the sanctuary, on the other hand, a new service area with facilities and housing was constructed on top of third-century fill. The most used structure in the fourth century was the Roman bath-house. It was abandoned around the turn of the century, that is around the same time as the Roman gymnasium of nearby Corinth.[94]

In the first half of the fifth century, probably in the second decennium, a long fortification wall, the so-called Hexamilion, was built across the isthmus to protect the Peloponnese from barbarian invasions. This wall contains many architectural elements from the Poseidon temple and other parts of the sanctuary. These spolia were used not only for practical reasons, but also as decorative elements.[95] The spoliation of essential buildings implies the end of the games, which may therefore be placed circa 410, that is, after the last literary attestation and before the construction of the wall.

The Nemean games For the later history of the Nemean games the 'letter on behalf of the Argives' is the main source. Besides establishing the

[91] Tremel 2004: no. 8; Jordan 1994: 116–25; 2004: 699. The reference to Friday confirms a late date for this tablet.

[92] Themistius, *Or.* 15.185c–186a (381); Claudian, *Panegyricus de Consulatu Flavii Manlii Theodori* 288–290 (399). Libanius, *Or.* 14.5, 7–8 has been interpreted to attest an *agonothetes* of the *Isthmia* somewhere between 328 and 338 (Rothaus 2000: 85–86). Libanius describes the Corinthian Menander as a member of the council who contributes to the "mysteries at the Isthmos" and makes expenditures related to the cult of, among other gods, Poseidon. The presidency of the *Isthmia* is, however, only one of the benefactions this could imply.

[93] Himerius, *Or.* 47.10.

[94] Michaud 1970: 956; Gregory 1995: 302–03; Rothaus 2000: 84–92, 141–46.

[95] Rothaus 2000: 141–42, Kardulias 2005: 130–31, and Gregory 1993: passim and esp. 139–40, for the date see 142. It is not clear on which grounds Lehmann 2007a: 67 and Gutsfeld, Hahn, and Lehmann 2007: 231 claim that the sanctuary was not spoliated.

continuity of the Nemean games into the mid fourth century, the letter further implies that the Argive games had financial difficulties at that time. To make their case, the Argives namely argued that the city already paid enough for its own *agones*. The Argives were paying for the biennial *Nemea* plus two quadrennial *agones* (including the *Aspis*, see below) and had, moreover, contributed for seven years to the spectacles in the provincial capital. The financial pressure on Argos was therefore heavier than on other organizers of *agones*, who did not have so many different expenses. Moreover, the winter *Nemea* and the quadrennial *Aspis* had had to compete for participants with the *agon Solis* in Rome since their introduction by Aurelian.[96] This may have been another factor in the difficulties, as – unless the Argives started paying considerably higher starting fees to the top athletes – they attracted fewer champions and therefore also fewer spectators spending money at Argos.

The letter on behalf of the Argives contains the last attestation of the Nemean games. If they continued, they were definitely no longer in the same league as the other traditional top games. In an oration addressed to Julian, Libanius mentions Delphi, Pisa, Corinth, and Athens rather than Argos.[97] In 381, Themistius similarly names the Olympics, the *Isthmia*, and the *Pythia* in one breath in a long agonistic metaphor, but leaves out the *Nemea*.[98] Archaeology is of no help in determining the precise end of the *Nemea*, as the stadium in Argos has not been excavated.[99] The financial problems and silence of authors suggest, however, that the *Nemea* were the first of the traditional top four to come to their end, probably already before 400, or even by 380.

On the basis of the available evidence, it is unlikely that the traditional top games ended around the same time, and certainly not all in 393. Most likely, the *Nemea* ended decades before the other contests, the Isthmian games disappeared shortly before the Olympics, and the *Pythia* survived longest. Delphi had in fact one advantage over Corinth and Elis, namely

[96] For the date of the *agon Solis* see Chapter 5, n. 22.

[97] Libanius, *Or.* 14.69.

[98] Themistius, *Or.* 15.185c–186a.

[99] There is even debate about its location. For a well-argued proposal, see Psychoyos 2008. Despite Pausanias' explicit mention in the book on Argos of the stadium "where the *agon* for Nemean Zeus and the *Heraia* were held" and numerous imperial-age inscriptions locating the *Nemea* ἐν Ἄργει (IG II² 3162, 3169–70, IG VII 49, IK Ephesos 1132, 1611, 1615, 2072, SEG XIII 310; in the same manner the Olympics, organized by the Eleans, are located ἐν Πείσῃ), Gutsfeld and Lehmann 2005: 35–39 (and again Gutsfeld, Hahn, and Lehmann 2007: 231) assert that the Nemean games were held at Nemea until late antiquity, on the basis of imperial-age objects found in the sanctuary. As such objects may show only that tourists were still attracted by the sights, there is no reason to doubt the conclusion of the excavators that the stadium was used for competitions only until the third century BC (Miller 2001: 90–138).

the proximity of the sports infrastructure to the town. The sanctuary of Apollo was adjacent to the city and, in the fifth and sixth centuries, the area had gradually and non-violently Christianized. The earliest evidence for a Christian community comes from the early fifth century. By circa 600, there was a church at every entrance to the sanctuary, but at the same time pagan statuary and buildings were left in place.[100] In the final decades of the agonistic circuit a bustling town, which possibly already had an episcopal seat, would have had fewer problems attracting visitors for an athletic festival than the remote stadia of more rural pagan sanctuaries such as Isthmia or Olympia.

Other *agones* and athletics in late-antique Greece

While the *Nemea* may have suffered from the tetrarchic legal redefinition of a top contest – because "sacred games in Rome or ancient Greece"[101] included its direct competitor for pre-eminence in the second winter of the Olympiad, the *agon Solis* in Rome – other contests in Greece may have benefitted when the concept of the *periodos* lost meaning, becoming relatively more attractive for athletes than before. A mosaic from Roman baths in Sparta, dated to the later third or early fourth century, attests the continued popularity of various *agones*. It depicts seven crowns with the names of games[102]: *Didymeia* (only attested in Miletus), *Olympia* (perhaps the original Olympics, but more probably the *Olympia Kommodeia* of Sparta), *Eurykleia* (Sparta), *Kaisaria* (probably those of Sparta, less likely those of Corinth)[103], *Kornelia* (location unknown, perhaps also Sparta?)[104], *Pythia*, and *Isthmia*.

Unfortunately, we do not know what happened to the majority of Greek contests in the course of the fourth century. Literary sources usually mention only the famous contests. The letter on behalf of the Argives does add that Argos organized two quadrennial contests besides the *Nemea*. These two must be the so-called *Aspis* or *Shield of Argos* and the *Sebasteia*. The *Aspis* was held shortly before the *Nemea* in the second year of the Olympiad. This contest is often mentioned immediately after the games of

[100] Robertson Brown 2006: 310–13. [101] *Cod. Iust.* 10.54.1. [102] SEG L 412.

[103] *Kaisareia* were more common in the first century AD, but I.Corinth III 272 and IK Ilion 125, both second or third century, attest later *Kaisareia* in Corinth and Sparta.

[104] The only other attestation of *Kornelia* is in a fragmentary inscription from Athens (2nd or 3rd c.), see *Hesperia* 17 (1948): 43–44. Considering the location of the other games – for the Athenian inscription these are the *Nemea*, the *Panathenaia*, the *Olympia* in Athens, and the games of the Asian *koinon* in Smyrna – a location in Greece or perhaps western Asia Minor seems likely.

the *periodos* in imperial-age victory lists. The *Sebasteia* were held shortly before the *Nemea* of the fourth year. They are known only from honorary inscriptions for *agonothetai*, not from victory lists, which suggests that they were not prestigious.[105] They could, however, profit from the infrastructure and visitors of the *Nemea*, which is no doubt the reason why they survived into the mid fourth century. The known *agonothetai* of the *Sebasteia* all presided over the *Nemea* as well. The additional costs for a second contest were negligible in comparison to the total, but could be an extra incentive for competitors. In this way the *Aspis* and the *Sebasteia* not only depended on the success of the *Nemea*, but in turn also supported it. Because of the way they were scheduled, the Argive games probably all disappeared within a few years of each other.

As for Argos, for Nikopolis in Epirus too the organization of sacred games had become a heavy burden by the mid fourth century. Claudius Mamertinus, consul of 362, in a speech of thanks to Julian from the same year paints an exaggerated picture of the ruin of Greece before Julian's restorations. In Nikopolis, his main example, "the unseemly cessation of business during that sorrowful time had allowed the public contest customarily observed every five years to lapse." Now Julian is in power, "gymnasia are crowded with happy, rejoicing people" and "ancient holidays are celebrated" again. Unlike some of the more general indications of decline, such as broken buildings, the mention of a quadrennial *agon* (*certamen*) – a clear reference to the *Aktia* – is not a topos, but the most concrete detail in the entire passage.[106] Julian's restoration of the Aktia may even explain why he picked precisely Nikopolis as an example. More information is not available, so we do not know for how long the *Aktia* were abandoned, nor how long they continued after Julian's restoration. Most likely, the effect of the revival was only temporary.

Athens seems to have been in a better position. Unlike Olympia, it was actually attacked by the Herulians, but the stadium does not show signs of damage.[107] The city remained a famous center of Greek culture in the

[105] IG IV 590; 606; V.1 1417. IG IV 590 (2nd c.) mentions *Antinoeia* in Argos as well, but these are attested only once and may have been a once-only event shortly after the death of Hadrian's beloved.

[106] *Panegyrici Latini* 3.9.3: *Certamen ludicrum lustris omnibus solitum frequentari intermiserat temporis maesti deforme iustitium*. Translation adapted from Nixon and Rodgers 1994. See also Bowden 2007: 140–41.

[107] Papanicolaou-Christensen 2003: 29. For the invasion see e.g. Millar 1969. The famous general of this battle, the historian Dexippos, was also *agonothetes* of the *Panathenaia* (IG II² 3669), probably in 256, cf. Martin 2006: 33.

fourth century, in the first place an intellectual center with a famous school of rhetorics. Of the four eiselastic *agones* in Athens, only the *Panathenaia* are attested after the third century.[108] The custom of giving multiple Panathenaic amphorae with olive oil had long disappeared, as this prize was quite unpractical for traveling athletes. By the end of the Hellenistic period, victors were probably awarded only one symbolic amphora. This practice seems to have continued into the fourth century, as is shown by a unique find on the Athenian agora: a large amphora-like vessel with on one side a long-robed female and on the other a nude young man, the typical iconography of Panathenaic amphorae, is dated to the early fourth century AD on the basis of the design and stratigraphic context. The large hole in the bottom, which made it unsuited for practical use, shows that the amphora was a purely symbolic object.[109]

In the mid fourth century, Himerius described in his oration 'to Basilius during the *Panathenaia* in the spring' the procession of the wooden ship through the city.[110] In another oration held at the beginning of a school year, the rhetor noted the presence in the audience of an old friend who used to study with him and had now come to Athens as a θεωρὸς καὶ ἀγωνοθέτης. It is not clear how one should interpret this title of *agonothetes*: had he presided over games in his own town along the Hellespont or was he sponsoring games in Athens? In any case his presence as *theoros*, that is as an ambassador with an agonistic interest, shows the continuing attraction of the Athenian games – presumably the *Panathenaia*, though other Athenian games may have survived as well. Another fourth-century *agonothetes* in Athens, Fl. Septimius Marcellinus, is attested on the building inscription of a gate.[111]

[108] Menander Rhetor 392 (ed. Russell and Wilson 1981) (late 3rd/early 4th c.), Themistius, *Or.* 3.41c (357), Himerius, *Or.* 47 (340–380).

[109] Most Panathenaic amphorae date from the late sixth to the fourth century BC. These are discussed by Bentz 1998. There are fewer examples – and of poorer quality – from the Hellenistic, and none from the first three centuries AD (Frel 1973: 29–32). As the victors of the late Hellenistic and imperial-age *Panathenaia* were normally professionals who immediately traveled on, selling a large supply of olive oil as was the practice before (see Bentz 1998: 116) – e.g. forty amphorae for a boy pankratiast in the fourth century BC – would have been burdensome. As an amphora is still shown on a second-century relief as the symbol of the *Panathenaia* (IG II² 3145), they must have received at least one symbolic amphora. For the fourth century AD example see Thompson 1960: 366 and Frel 1973: fig. 33.

[110] *Or.* 47.12–16. Although several spring scenes are described in the oration, the date in the spring was long considered problematic (e.g. Penella 2007: 253–54 n. 182), because it is in contradiction with the classical date in summer. Strasser 2000: 462–80 and Gouw 2008 have convincingly shown that the *Panathenaia* were moved to spring, presumably under Hadrian.

[111] IG II² 5206.

A verse inscription, dated to the early fifth century on the basis of its style and palaeography, honors the sophist Ploutarchos for sponsoring three times the procession of the ship. This man can perhaps be identified with the pagan neoplatonic philosopher and scholarch of the Academy, who died in 431/432.[112] Even if he was another Ploutarchos, the inscription shows that the *Panathenaia* survived at least until the early fifth century. Archaeology does not provide a more precise date. The stadium continued to exist as a visible structure in the Middle Ages, during which marble was removed, which makes it impossible to determine on the basis of stratigraphy the end of its use for agonistic purposes.[113]

The evidence for the Athenian ephebate, which consists almost exclusively of inscriptions, disappears after the Herulian invasion. As for the Olympics, the lack of new inscriptions after this date should not be connected to the invasion, but to empire-wide changing epigraphic practices. The invasion did cause the removal of the ephebic inscriptions from the Diogeneion, the gymnasium where the ephebes trained: the fortification wall built as a reaction to the invasion in the immediate vicinity of the gymnasium and the many monuments in the building served as ready building stones.[114] This of course does not mean that the ephebes no longer exercised.[115] The well-off youth of Athens still visited gymnasia for physical exercises. Himerius, teaching circa 340–380, wrote after a period of illness that his students had to leave their balls and stop playing games in the palaistra, and focus on his lessons again.[116] While these students played with balls, it is possible that others still trained as ephebes in the traditional sports. The ephebic lists of the mid third century are the longest of the imperial period[117], and a sudden cessation of such a popular institution seems unlikely. The Spartan ephebate, the *agoge*, certainly survived into the fourth century. The main festival, the whipping contest, was witnessed by Libanius in the 330s, and is also mentioned several decades later by Themistius and Gregory of Nazianzus.[118] For Athens, perhaps the

[112] IG II² 3818. This inscription is probably the source behind Neils' unexplained assertion that the festival lasted until 410 (Neils 1992: 13). Translation and commentary on this text in Sironen 1994: 46–48.

[113] Papanicolaou-Christensen 2003: 30–41.

[114] These are all the inscriptions that in IG II² are located near the church of St. Dimitrios Katiphoris, which stood in the nineteenth century on the corner of what are now the streets Kyrristou and Odos Erechtheos. Cf. Lattanzi 1968: 15–17, 30–32.

[115] As already noted by Kennell 2006: xiv.

[116] Himerius, *Or.* 69.7.

[117] IG II² 2239, 2243, 2245. Cf. Dumont 1876: 51–58.

[118] The development of the *agoge* as a Spartan ephebate is discussed in Kennel 1995. On pp. 149–61 he lists all testimonia on the whipping contest. Most relevant for the fourth century are Libanius, *Or.* 1.23, Themistius, *Or.* 21.250A, Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 4.70 and 103; 39.4; *Carm.* 2.2.7.272–273.

excavations of the Diogeneion, the gymnasium where the ephebes trained, will bring an answer. A continued use of this building into the fifth century has already been proposed forty years ago on the basis of a building inscription found less than 200 m from the site of this gymnasium. This text attests a large-scale restoration in the period 395–401 of the monumental gate of a building, which can perhaps be identified with the Diogeneion.[119]

For the evolution of athletics in other gymnasia across Greece, and for minor contests, sparse archaeological finds are our only clues. Two mosaics with athletic scenes may point to a continued popularity of athletics circa 300. In a large room in a gymnasium at Chalcis, the wide frieze of the floor mosaic depicts several athletic scenes: boxers, wrestlers, and a prize-table can still be recognized. The style suggests that this mosaic was an addition of the later third century. A large mosaic from Chios, dated to the late third or early fourth century, contains six figurative panels, four with *venationes*, one with a wrestling match, and one with boxers.[120]

In certain athletic structures a declining interest in the sports facilities is noticeable. In the stadium and gymnasium of Messene, for example, which formed one complex belonging to the Asklepios sanctuary, some low-quality restorations can be dated to the third and fourth centuries. The complex was abandoned with the rest of the sanctuary about 360–370.[121] The gymnasium of Samos, which was attached to the stadium, was extensively renovated in the late third century. These works focused mainly on the baths, however, and even blocked the entrance to the palaistra, which seems to have gone out of use. The abandonment of the baths followed after an earthquake in the mid fourth century. The presence of ashes from the heating installation of these baths on the running track of the nearby stadium and in the entrance to the seats indicates that this stadium had fallen into disuse before the earthquake. In the stadia of both Messene and Samos, however, no games of international fame were held in the imperial age.[122]

[119] IG II^2 5205. The building had a neuter name beginning with an A, Δ, or Λ. For the hypothetical identification with the Diogeneion see Frantz 1979.

[120] Bohne 2011: K68 (Chalcis). For the date, she refers to the way the tesserae are set, the failure to show perspective, the blocked outline of the figures, and the frontal depiction of the athletes. Tsaravopoulos 1986; Bohne 2011: K69 (Chios). The mosaic is dated on the basis of stylistic arguments (similarities to the mosaics of Piazza Armerina), and of 'early Christian' ceramic below the mosaic.

[121] Themelis 1998: 18, 21, 33; 2003: 34–35, 101–10.

[122] Martini 1984: 257–72.

Athletics in Constantinople

Little is known about *agones* in Constantinople. After the 260s, nothing more is heard of the *Sebasta* of Byzantium, which probably dated from after the destruction and renovation of the city by Septimius Severus,[123] but this does not necessarily mean that this contest disappeared with the refoundation of the city under Constantine.

According to the *Patria Konstantinoupoleos*, Constantine completed the monumental circus that Septimius Severus had left unfinished and inaugurated it in about 330 with a "gymnic and hippic contest (γυμνικὸς καὶ ἱππικὸς ἀγών)."[124] It is not entirely clear whether this should be read as a reference to a traditional *agon* or to circus games. Γυμνικὸς ἀγών was the normal term for the athletic competitions of a Greek contest and is commonly used from Herodotus in the fifth century BC to Libanius in the fourth century AD. In the fifth century, when most of these contests had disappeared, the expression becomes rare. From this time onward, it is mainly used in lexica and encyclopedic works, which deal with antiquity and quote ancient sources verbatim. In a couple of later passages, however, this expression is not copy-pasted but consciously used for contemporary games that are not traditional *agones* (see below). This is a practice of authors with a creative classicizing style, such as Procopius, who use the now antiquated expression to create a reminiscence of classical games.[125] The *Patria* are a work full of fanciful stories on the origin and topography of Constantinople, composed about 990, and heavily based on earlier sources. The first book, on the origin of the city, is taken over almost verbatim from a sixth-century work by pseudo-Hesychius; the passage on the inauguration of the hippodrome, however, is an addition to pseudo-Hesychius from the tenth-century redaction on the basis of unknown sources.[126] Because the expression γυμνικὸς καὶ ἱππικὸς ἀγών is more often copied than written by Byzantine authors, it may indicate that this passage of the *Patria* is ultimately derived from a fourth-century source, and, therefore, that Constantine indeed celebrated the completion of the circus with an *agon*.

That the Greek-style contest of Constantine was organized in the circus should not be a surprise, as the multifunctional use of entertainment buildings (e.g. combat sports in theaters, *venationes* in stadia, *agones* in

[123] IG II² 3169/70, CIG 3676, IK Smyrna 667.
[124] *Patria Konstantinoupoleos* 1.62 (ed. Preger 1907). [125] Cameron 1985: 33–34.
[126] For the different redactions of the *Patria* and its sources see Dagron 1984: 21–60 and Berger 1988: 29–85, esp. 54–60.

hippodromes) was normal in the imperial age.[127] Some of the statues on the barrier of the circus – famous monuments taken from elsewhere to adorn the new hippodrome, all relating to the broad theme of 'victory' – were traditionally associated with athletics, such as the Delphic tripods and representations of Herakles and the Dioskouroi.[128] Constantine did not complete the circus in order to stage athletic contests, however. When it came to spectacles, new Rome imitated old Rome. Horse racing quickly gained popularity and *agones* ended up on the margins of Constantinopolitan entertainment. This was also their original place in the old capital. The eventual centrality of Rome in the imperial agonistic circuit was strongly linked to the presence of the international athletic association there, but as the headquarters of this association remained in Rome, Constantinople never replaced the old capital in this field. Yet at least one contest – whether it were the old *Sebasta*, the *agon* of Constantine, which may even have been a refoundation of the same contest, or yet another *agon* – survived into the later fourth century. It was apparently interrupted in the 350s or 360s, as Valens restored it in 369. The laconic note on this event in Jerome's *Chronicle* unfortunately does not shed any light on the circumstances.[129]

The frequent shows in the circus created interesting opportunities for those athletes who did not want to restrict themselves to *agones*. The crowd in the circus of Constantinople was entertained with all kinds of side events in between the horse races. There are a few examples of athletes who performed here. In an anecdote in the *Apophthegmata*, a group of *pammacharii* (i.e. athletes specializing in a free-style form of wrestling[130]) asked the help of a government official in Tyre to find them a ship to travel to Constantinople, where they wished to perform.[131] When Saint Theodore of Sykeon visited the capital in the reign of Mauricius (582–602), he healed a wrestler, who was possessed by an evil spirit and hence in pain.[132] The use of the Latin term λουκτάτωρ (*luctator*) for a wrestler clearly shows the Roman influence of the circus. Procopius describes in his report of the Nika riots of 532 the imperial throne as the place "from which the emperor

[127] Humphrey 1996: 123–25 lists buildings doubling as stadium and hippodrome. This multiple use is also reflected in the use of the word στάδιον for hippodromes. Many stadia and theaters were adapted to accommodate games with wild animals, see Robert 1940: 34–35. Combat sports in the theater are attested for example in Antioch (Libanius, *Or.* 10.1) and Aphrodisias (statues of the boxers).

[128] Bassett 2004: 62–63, 66.

[129] Jerome, *Eusebii Caesariensis Chronicon. Hieronymi continuato* (ed. Helm 1956) A. 369: *Agon Constantinopoli a Valente redditus*.

[130] Remijsen 2010b: 201–04.

[131] *Apophthegmata* 39 (ed. Nau 1907).

[132] *Vita Theodori Syceotae* 88 (ed. Festugière 1970).

was always accustomed to watch the equestrian and athletic contest," using the traditional but now uncommon expression ἱππικὸς καὶ γυμνικὸς ἀγών.[133] That these words came to his mind when thinking about the circus indicates that athletics did happen here, though its importance should not be overrated; that the horse races are named first is no coincidence.

The practice of including athletic competitions in the circus games continued long in Constantinople. Tenth-century sources show that running contests especially were popular at the time and that each circus faction had its own runners.[134] Niketas Choniates tells an episode of 1184, which gives a good idea of the elements of circus games at the time: Andronikos I Komnenos, frightened by the hooligans in the hippodrome, in order to save his reputation was advised not to run off immediately, so he stayed for the horse races and the athletic competition, but then left before the acrobats climbing ropes and the staged hunt with hares.[135] Similarly to Procopius, Choniates describes the first two events as τὸν ἱππικὸν καὶ γυμνικὸν ἄεθλον, here again perhaps a literary reminiscence of classical games. While ἄεθλον seems at first sight even more archaic and poetic – in classical and imperial texts ἆθλον is only rarely used as a poetic synonym for ἀγών – for the Byzantine audience only the epsilon would have had that effect, for by the sixth century ἆθλον had become a common word for a horse race, as shown by circus programs on papyrus.[136]

Athletic exercises as a pastime continued at least until the sixth century, although a structured system of physical education, such as the ephebate, no longer existed in the Byzantine world.[137] Procopius tells an anecdote about a heroic single combat in 530 between a Persian and the Greek Andreas, who was not actually a soldier of the Roman army, but the bath attendant of the general Bouzes. When both fighters had fallen to the ground and tried to get back on their feet, Andreas benefitted from his athletic background and defeated the Persian. The purpose of this obviously fictional story is stylistic, but it is nevertheless telling that when Procopius needed a credible fictitious wrestler, he chose a *paidotribes*

[133] Procopius, *De Bellis* 1.24.42: τὸν βασίλειον θρόνον, ὅθεν ἀεὶ βασιλεὺς εἰώθει τόν τε ἱππικὸν καὶ γυμνικὸν θεᾶσθαι ἀγῶνα.
[134] Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De ceremoniis* II 80 (71) – 81 (72) (ed. Vogt 1935); Heron Byzantius, *Γεωδαισία* 5 (ed. Sullivan 2000). Cf. Guilland 1965: 12–13.
[135] *Historia* (ed. van Dieten 1975) 290. [136] P. Bingen 128, P.Oxy. LXXIX 5216.
[137] Giatsis 1989: 159. For a further discussion see his unpublished Ph.D.thesis in modern Greek on the hippodrome and physical activities in Byzantium (*non vidi*).

from Constantinople, who accompanied the army as bath attendant of the general.[138]

Things seem to have changed by the end of the century. A certain Menander wrote repentantly about his wild years in the 570s: besides being passionate about horse racing and pantomime, "I undressed to exercise in the palaistra and ended up there out of stupidity; because, along with my cloak, I also removed my common sense and everything else bringing honor in life."[139] The old idea that athletic exercises were an appropriate pastime for a decent citizen had disappeared. Though exercising without clothes could still appeal to young men, it was now considered indecent.

Of particular interest for the reception of ancient athletic contests in Constantinople is a delightful anecdote recorded by the same Niketas Choniates. After Alexios III Angelos (1195–1203) had married off his daughters for the second time, the newly-weds wanted to see circus games. These were not organized in the hippodrome as usual, but the emperor had the chariots brought to the palace in the suburb of Blachernai, where a place to watch the race (θέατρον) was improvised – with the bellows of an organ serving as turning points. A eunuch dressed up as a circus official opened the games. Then, as a prelude to the races, there was an athletic contest. "And they who put on the athletic contest were not the vulgar and baseborn, mind you, but youths of noble family growing their first beard. Only the emperor and empress and their distinguished relations and most trusted attendants viewed this comic play-acting; entrance was barred to all others. When the time arrived for the athletic contest of running the *diaulos*, the eunuch who played the role of mapparius took his position in the center, uncovered his arms, and putting on a round silver headdress, thrice summoned the lads to get set for the race. A certain noble youth, notable for the lofty rank he held, stood behind the eunuch, and whenever the latter bent over and gave the signal for the race to begin, he would kick him so hard with the flat of his foot on the buttocks that the noise could be heard everywhere."[140]

In order to counter the expectations of the readers, who were only acquainted with circus athletes, Choniates begins by explaining that the participants did not belong to the lower class; the base entertainment of the

[138] Procopius, *De Bellis* 1.13.29–38.

[139] Suidas, s.v. Μένανδρος: οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ παλαίστραις ἐναπεδυόμην καὶ ἐς τοσοῦτον ἐξώκειλα ἀφροσύνης, ὡς καὶ τὸν φαινόλην ἀποδύσασθαι, συναποδύσασθαι δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ νουνεχές, καὶ ἄλλο ὅ τι ἐς βίου ἀγλάϊσμα.

[140] *Historia* (ed. van Dieten 1975) 509. Translation adapted from Magoulias 1984: 280–81.

circus was not worth describing. This particular contest, however, was an imitation of a traditional ephebic *agon*. The organizer knew more or less what these games looked like: the boys were of the right age and social class and competitions were named by their technical terms (e.g. *diaulos*). Because the Byzantine elite was at home in ancient literature, they evidently still knew what the ancient games were about.[141] The *agonothetes* was replaced by a *mapparius*, who was the normal circus official to give the starting signal. The attitude towards practicing athletics had not changed since the sixth century. Niketas anticipated the shock of his Byzantine readers about these aristocrats doing athletics by stressing that these were mere boys, that admission was restricted, and that it was not a real contest, but just a funny game (τά γελοιώδη παίγνια and τά μειρακιώδη ταῦτα ἀθύρματα) and a staged performance (τὰ σκηνικά). The slapstick anecdote of kicking the eunuch reinforces this picture.

Though nothing in this story suggests an actual revival of Greek athletics in the Komnenian age, it is nevertheless striking that Byzantine high society found it an entertaining idea in 1200 to stage a classical *agon*, just for the fun of it, and that a historian of the time found this worth recording. This should be understood in the context of what Kaldellis has coined the 'Third Sophistic' of the twelfth century.[142] Under the Komnenoi and Angeloi (1081–1204), there was among the Byzantines, who considered themselves to be in the first place Christians and Romans, a renewed interest in things Greek: classical literature, science, culture, and history. This happened at a time of changing values: in particular the traditional Christian subordination of the body to the soul came under pressure because of a growing appreciation of military heroism and of physical beauty. The classical Greek discourse was far better suited to express these new values than the prevailing Christian one. Educated hellenophile aristocrats imagined themselves in the world of the Second Sophistic, by performing or even role-playing traditional Greekness. This twelfth-century renaissance is mostly documented through works of literature, which naturally gives the impression that it was a strictly intellectual pursuit, but the above story suggests that outside the small group of intellectuals who were able to imitate the Greek literary language, less sophisticated members of the elite – though of course sufficiently educated

[141] Decker 2008 discusses a passage of Nikephoros Gregoras (10.3.1), who compared a French-style tournament in Constantinople in 1332 with the Olympic games, as evidence for the existence of "immer noch konkrete Vorstellungen" of the Olympic games in Byzantium. The above anecdote offers a far better illustration of this point.

[142] Kaldellis 2007: 225–316, esp. 232, 246, 260.

to understand the allusions – enjoyed such performances of Greekness as well. Niketas Choniates was a member of this hellenophile circle, which explains both his choice to include the story and the stylistic reminiscences to classical games mentioned before. Besides being a scholar, he also held the high position of grand *logothetes* in Constantinople at the time of these games[143], and that was how he knew about this little afternoon amusement of the imperial family.

[143] Magoulias 1984: xiv.

CHAPTER 2

Asia Minor

The agonistic tradition

The Greek cities along the west coast of Asia Minor were acquainted with athletics as it developed in Greece. From the seventh century on, athletes from Asia Minor participated in the Olympics, although they won there only exceptionally.[1] The cities seem to have had few games of their own. Athletic and artistic contests for Ionian competitors were organized in Ephesus under the name *Ephesia* in the fifth century.[2] There were no Asian contests with panhellenic ambitions, however. Diagoras of Rhodes, who lived closer to Asia Minor than to Greece, is credited by Pindar with victories in his home town and in Greece, but none in Asia Minor.[3]

In the fourth and particularly the third century BC, Greek cities on the west coast of Asia Minor became more active in the field. We see for example that athletes from Asia Minor became much better represented among the fourth-century Olympic victors.[4] Athletic talent was even actively promoted: in the third century, Ephesus granted financial help and citizenship to a boy who had himself proclaimed as Ephesian after his victory in the *Nemea*.[5] The first games with panhellenic ambitions were founded in the late third century. In 208 BC, the Magnesians sent out embassies to more than a hundred cities from Sicily to Iran to request *asylia* for their sanctuary and stephanitic status for their *Leukophryena*.[6] Around the same time Miletus introduced stephanitic *Didymeia* and Pergamon *Nikephoria*. Cyzicus and other cities sent out ambassadors to announce

[1] Moretti 1957: nos. 29 (668 BC, Smyrna), 79, 225 (596 and 476, Miletus), 329 (424, Magnesia on the Meander).
[2] Thucydides 3.104.
[3] Pindar, *Ol.* 7, 80–89.
[4] Moretti 1957: nos. 378, 385, 398, 431, 438, 449, 454, 470, 474, 475, 479, 488, 500 (athletes from Ephesus, Miletus, Colophon, Halicarnassus, and Magnesia). Cf. Remijsen 2009b: 174–75.
[5] Robert 1967: 14–32; Brunet 2003a: 227–30.
[6] IvM 16. See Rigsby 1996: 179–279 for the complete *asylia* dossier of Magnesia.

their games in the second century.[7] The inspiration for these new projects came from the Aegean, where the *Asklepieia* of Kos had already become stephanitic in the 240s BC.[8] In these *Asklepieia*, men from Ionia and Caria formed the majority of the competitors.[9]

While athletics had the strongest tradition in Ionia and Caria, in the Hellenistic period it also spread to the northern and southern coasts and eventually inland. In Pamphylia, for example, the first stadia were built in the early Hellenistic period.[10] Competitors from Pergamon and the Troad, an area close to Ionia, appear in the Olympic victor list from the third century on, athletes from Bithynia, Pamphylia, or Lydia from the second and first century on.[11] Olympic victors from further inland, such as Phrygia, Pisidia, and Cappadocia, are attested only in the imperial period, and even then only rarely.[12] The same evolution can be observed for the spread of gymnasia: in the third century these were still limited to cities near the west coast; in the second and first centuries they became common on the northwestern and southern coast and in Lydia, and were occasionally constructed further inland.[13] Boys were trained here as ephebes and exhibited their talents in local gymnasium games called *Hermaia* or *Herakleia*.[14] Having a gymnasium became a symbol of being a *polis*: when the military settlers in Tyriaion (Phrygia) asked Eumenes II for *polis* status, they wanted not only a constitution and laws, but also a gymnasium.[15]

The first Olympic victor from Pergamon was a member of the Attalid dynasty.[16] This royal house shared with the Ptolemies an interest in horse races. While in the third century, they were not yet a real match for their colleagues from Egypt, in the first half of the second century both dynasties were equally successful at the *Panathenaia*. Hellenistic kings also stimulated the spread of gymnasia and athletics in cities in their sphere of influence with donations of oil, of banquets for gymnasium members, or of complete

[7] Syll.³ 590 (Miletus); Strabo 2.3.4 (Cyzicus); Rigsby 1996: nos. 165 (Cyzicus), 172 (Colophon), 174 (unknown), 178–79 (Pergamon).
[8] For the whole *asylia* dossier see Rigsby 1996: 112–53, esp. nos. 21 and 23. Cf. SEG LIII 850.
[9] Klee 1918: 118 gives a table of the provenance of victors for the third and second centuries BC. About half of them are from Asia Minor and about a third from the Aegean.
[10] Grainger 2009: 58–60, 103, 172.
[11] Moretti 1957: nos. 276 (276 BC, Pergamon), 590 (212, Troas), 596 (204, Tenedos), 597 (204, Assos), 613 (176, Aspendos), 650–51 (116–112, Nicea), 653 (108, Philadelphia), 699 (68, Hypaipa), 734 (8 BC, Thyateira).
[12] The first is Diodotos of Tyana (Moretti 1957: no. 730), Olympic *stadion* victor of 16 BC.
[13] Groß-Albenhausen 2007: 313–14.
[14] E.g. CIG 3087 (Teos), MAMA VI 173 (Phrygian Apamea), IvP II 252 (Pergamon), IK Ephesos 1101 (Ephesus).
[15] SEG XLVII 1745. [16] IAG 37.

buildings, usually after a request for help from the city. Such donations are attested in Asia Minor and on nearby islands, by the Attalids and Seleucids as well as the Ptolemies and the dynasties from Bithynia and Pontus.[17] In turn, cities also honored kings with festivities, sometimes including contests, such as the *Ptolemaia* and *Eumeneia* in Ephesus.[18]

Although many Asian cities had games by the later Hellenistic period, these contests did not yet attract many international competitors, not even those announced as stephanitic. That the games, especially those further inland, indeed attracted mostly local athletes is for example shown by a victor list of the *Rhomaia* in Xanthos.[19] Most of the Hellenistic games in Asia are therefore little or not known: because of their limited catchment area, they do not appear on victory inscriptions, which mainly honor the champions active in the major games in Greece.

From the first century BC on, however, athletes became more mobile and the Asian agonistic circuit profited from this. The international association of athletic victors received from Marc Antony the right to organize games in Miletus.[20] The introduction of the imperial cult for Augustus formed another stimulus for new games, for example for the *Kaisareia* in Halicarnassus or Sardis and the *Sebasta Rhomaia* in Pergamon.[21] The latter games were organized by the *koinon* of Asia. Such *koina* organizing the provincial imperial cult were particularly important vehicles for the introduction of new games in the early first century AD, certainly in provinces where contests were not common before, such as Bithynia, Cappadocia, or Galatia.[22]

The biggest upsurge of new games took place in the second and third centuries AD. The most important contests, the schedule for which was set out in Hadrian's second letter to the association of performing artists, were the *Koina Asias* and *Hadrianeia* in Smyrna, the *Augusteia* in Pergamon, and the *Hadrianeia, Olympia*, and *Balbilleia* at Ephesus.[23] These three cities also competed for the rank of 'first city' of the province of Asia. Besides the contests scheduled by Hadrian, there was an ever increasing number of smaller games. Those in towns on the western and northwestern coasts, most importantly the different *Koina Asias*, had an international catchment area of second-rank athletes and some real champions. Games in less accessible areas still attracted mostly locals. Typical of Lycia, Pisidia, and Pamphylia – but also attested in Cilicia – is the term θέμις for a small-scale

[17] Ameling 2007: 132–38. [18] IK Ephesos 1082. [19] SEG XXVIII 1246.
[20] IAG 59. Cf. Ebert 1987: 38. [21] IAG 59–61.
[22] E.g. IAG 62 and 65. See Mitchell 1993: I.219.
[23] Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 2, l. 68–70, 72–73.

contest instituted with the money of a local benefactor, instead of ἀγὼν θεματικός, which is used elsewhere.[24] With all these minor competitions plus the many regional and international contests, the agonistic circuit of Asia Minor was particularly dense by the third century – with the exception of remote Cappadocia and Galatia, where perhaps only the main cities had games.[25]

Athletics in Asia Minor in the late third century

The last known institution of a new contest is that of the *Metropolitios Takitios Kaisaria* or the *Takitios Metropolitios Sebasteios agon*, which is attested on the latest agonistic coins.[26] A marble stele at Perge celebrates the grant of *metropolis* status to Perge by Tacitus (275–276) through a series of acclamations, one of which refers to these games: "Glorify Perge, where men of consular rank act as contest-president." Several graffiti repeat the name of the contest.[27] These texts can no longer be considered agonistic inscriptions. Written in a new genre, the marble stele illustrates how ways of conveying honor were changing in the later third century. Oral acclamations in public assemblies were a common practice throughout the imperial period, but the growing need to record them reflects their increasing importance in late antiquity.[28] Honorary inscriptions, on the other hand, were no longer erected for the local elite and late-antique inscriptions are therefore mostly uninformative about athletics. Information from authors is, moreover, particularly scarce for Asia, and the athletic infrastructure is rarely studied with attention to late-antique phases.[29] The evidence for late-antique athletics is hence particularly disparate in Asia

[24] E.g. TAM II 301–305 (Lycia), SEG XVIII 572 (Pamphylia), SEG VI 612 (Pisidia). For examples on coins see Leschhorn 1998: 53–55. General discussion in Farrington 2008.

[25] There is no complete list of all Asian games. Mitchell 1993: I.217–25 gives a good overview. Leschhorn 1998: 49–56 lists all *agones* attested on civic coins. The agonistic inscriptions have not yet been collected, although in particular for small-scale prize games, they can offer significant additions to Leschhorn's list. A good example of multiple local contests in a minor town is Oenoanda (evidence collected in Hall and Milner 1994; cf. Wörrle 1988: 4–17). IAG 68–90 show which games on the western coast had an international attraction. IAG 80 is an example of a second-rank runner, an Aphrodisian who focused on the Asian circuit and won many little-known contests, but none of the Asian top games, where he would have run against the faster international stars.

[26] Leschhorn 1998: 53. It has been suggested that the *Maximianeios agon* of Pisidian Antioch was established under Galerius Maximianus about 300 (Anderson 1913: 299–300), but Mitchell 1998: 13 has shown convincingly that this was a private foundation of the second century.

[27] IK Perge 331 = SEG XXXIV 1306, ll. 19–20: αὔξε Πέργη, ἣ ὑπατικοὶ ἀγω[ν]οθετοῦσιν. Graffiti published as IK Perge 332–336.

[28] Roueché 1984: 181–88.

[29] For problems relating to the archaeology of stadia in Asia Minor see Roos 1994.

Minor, in striking contrast to the abundance of inscriptions and coins from the second and earlier third centuries. One must look beyond this drastic change in the source situation in the 260s and 270s, however, and evaluate critically whether these decades were as significant for the history of athletics as they seem.

The western and southern coasts of Asia were in the later third century plagued by barbarian raids as well as earthquakes. Goths, allied with the Herulians, invaded Asia in the 260s. They pillaged, for example, the temple of Artemis in Ephesus, and invaded inland Anatolia too.[30] Around the same time, a major earthquake occurred in Ionia. Seat blocks, attributed to the stadium of Ancyra, were reused in the city wall constructed in connection with the Gothic incursions.[31] As in Greece, these disasters did not have a strong effect on athletics in general, however. The example of Perge already shows that new Asian contests were still instituted afterwards.[32] Valerian and Gallienus (253–268), under whose reigns the troubles took place, granted more than twenty new contests in Asia Minor.[33] Damage to athletic infrastructures was repaired, moreover. The stadia of both Ephesus and Miletus received monumental gates in the late third century, and the reliefs on the new gate of the Ephesian stadium portrayed traditional agonistic themes such as palm branches and prize amphorae.[34] For both cities the continuity of athletic games in this period is confirmed by other sources. The situation in Ephesus will be discussed in the next section; a late third- or early fourth-century mosaic from Sparta refers to the *Didymeia* at Miletus.[35]

In Ancyra a benefactor was honored about 260–285 for restoring the destroyed gymnasium of Polyneidos and for building a city wall in times of famine and barbarian incursions. In the early fourth century, a certain Johannes paid for a second phase of renovations.[36] In Ephesus, proconsul L. Artorius Pius Maximus was honored in the reign of Diocletian for his many great works for the fatherland and for renovating the gymnasium.[37]

[30] Magie 1950: 1566–68 n. 28 gives an overview of the evidence. See also Mitchell 1993: I.235–36.
[31] Görkay 2006: 269.
[32] Slightly earlier, in Cremna (Pisidia), a new contest was granted by Aurelian; see Leschhorn 1998: 54. Photographs of the agonistic coins of Cremna in Leschhorn 2004: 63–64, nos. 135 and 141.
[33] A list in Wallner 1997: 165.
[34] von Gerkan 1921: 40–41 dated this part of the stadium of Miletus to the late third century on the basis of coins from the reign of Aurelian, Diocletian, and Maximian. The gate at Ephesus is dated to this period because several third-century inscriptions were used as building material. Cf. Heberdey 1912: 180–82; Keil 1964: 61–63; Karwiese 1994: 24.
[35] SEG L 412. [36] IGR III 206 = CIG 4015; CIG 4045. Cf. Foss 1977: 32.
[37] IK Ephesos 621. Cf. PLRE I: 589.

Both texts illustrate the continuing popularity of gymnasia, but they do not prove that athletics was still a favored activity here. The popularity of athletics as a pastime may in fact have declined earlier than the contests. In the building history of the Ephesian gymnasia, Steskal perceived a gradually decreasing interest in athletics from the late second century on. The four great gymnasium complexes, all built between the later first and mid second century, contained baths as well as sports facilities. Alterations to the palaistras in the later second and particularly in the third century made them more multifunctional, but also less suited for sports. The palaistra of the east gymnasium was reduced in size because an auditorium was added and in the palaistra of the Vedius gymnasium the water basins were replaced with benches. The Halls of Verulanus, a large palaistra next to the Harbor baths, was not restored after it was destroyed by the earthquake, but overbuilt with simple living quarters, although the nearby baths remained in use.[38] In Sardis, parts of the palaistra were sacrificed in the late third century for the extension of the adjacent synagogue.[39]

The disappearance of athletics from the gymnasia was not yet general in the later third century. The early third-century baths of Faustina in Miletus, which had a large palaistra, were restored after the raids of the Goths by a certain Makarios. In epigrams erected in the gymnasium, he is called "second athlothetes of the toils of Faustina," a poetic way of saying that he was the second contest president of the games founded by Faustina.[40]

Both Makarios and his wife Eucharia had typically Christian names. This is not the only indication that Christians were involved in athletics in Asia. In Eumenia in Phrygia, the mid third-century funerary monument of Aurelius Eutyches alias Helix, victor in some minor contests, refers to the 'living god', a typically Christian formula.[41] Likewise a late third-century funerary inscription for a contest president from Claudiopolis in Bithynia is definitely Christian.[42]

The restorations to stadia and late references to games show that competitive athletics were still flourishing about 300, despite the declining interest in athletic exercises in gymnasia, emerging Christianity, and the late third-century disasters. The two following sections will discuss how the situation of Greek athletics evolved in the fourth and fifth centuries at two other, well-studied sites, Ephesus and Aphrodisias.

[38] Yegül 1992: 313; Steskal 2003: 234–37. [39] Yegül 1986: 25.
[40] IvMilet I 339 = Steinepigramme I 01/20/16. For the structure of the baths see Yegül 1992: 291–92.
[41] SEG VI 203. [42] IK Klaudiu polis 44.

Athletics in Ephesus

After Diocletian's redivision of the Empire into dioceses and smaller provinces, Ephesus became the capital of the diocese and of the province of Asia, and therefore the first city of Asia Minor. Ephesus had long been a proud and ambitious city, with a great agonistic program: in the second and third centuries, it had about ten different contests, of which the *Olympia, Hadrianeia*, and *Balbilleia* were the most prestigious.[43] Most of these are known exclusively from agonistic inscriptions and therefore disappear from our radar in the late third century. The changes to the stadium about 300, however, show that the Ephesian contests did not come to an abrupt end. Unfortunately, evidence for the early fourth century is lacking.

The fate of the existing honorary monuments can offer some indications. While certain agonistic inscriptions were discovered near the place where they were originally erected, for example in the Harbor baths, the theater, or the area of the *prytaneion*, many were found elsewhere reused as building material, especially in the streets called *Arkadiane* and *Embolos* (i.e. the *Kuretenstraße* of the Austrian excavators) and the forum of Theodosius, all extensively renovated in the late fourth or early fifth century.[44] Most reuse can be dated after the heavy earthquake of about 360. In the late third century, when the damage of an earlier earthquake was being restored, agonistic statues apparently still stood on their original location and were spared when other building material was available. This suggests continuity until at least the early fourth century. During the renovations in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, however, these monuments were no longer regarded with the same respect and were removed. They were not only used as functional blocks. On the southern end of the *Embolos*, near the Herakles gate, a row of bases with bronze Victories from various second- and third-century contexts, some of them agonistic, was set up to flank a statue of empress Aelia Flacilla (379–386). This propagandist project preserved agonistic monuments, but the agonistic reference was lost with their displacement.[45]

With respect to athletics in the second half of the fourth century, an inscription of 372 deserves closer attention. The monument contains a bilingual imperial rescript of Valentinian I, Valens, and Gratian to the

[43] Lehner 2004: 127–224 gives an overview of each of them.

[44] For agonistic inscriptions from Ephesus and their approximate find spots see IK Ephesos 1081–1169. Examples of late-antique reuse are 1081, 1081A, 1082A, 1131, 1136 (St. John's Church, 6th c.), 1083, 1083A, 1102, 1126, 1158 (forum of Theodosius, renovations early 5th c.), 1086A, 1099, 1153 (*Embolos*, renovations circa 400), 1090–1094, 1119, 1121A, 1143, 1145, 1150, 1151, 1154, 1155 (*Arkadiane*, renovations late 4th c.) 1114, 1116, 1117 (Scholasticia baths, 5th c.).

[45] Roueché 2002: esp. nos. 6, 10, 12, and 13.

proconsul of Asia, Festus, with regulations for festivities of the province. Its main purpose was a more even distribution of the expenses between the cities.[46] The introductory first sentence promises "good regulations for the honor of Asia and the dignity of the whole province, after the example of Illyricum and Italy."[47] Then the emperors explain the arrangements for the festive procession of the public assembly (l. 3: *[po]npa conventus publici* / l. 16: τὴν πομπὴν τῆ<ς> συνόδου τῆς δημοσίας): the four *metropoleis* of Asia (i.e. Ephesus, Pergamon, Smyrna, and Tralleis) had to appoint in turn a *coronatus* of the province to organize these festivities. The at times difficult task of finding a candidate for this liturgy became evenly spread: every city had to do it only once every four years. Festus had inquired whether men from smaller cities could also perform services (l. 7: *edendi mun[er]is*) and the emperors answered that citizens of smaller cities, who aspired to greater glory, were allowed to act as asiarch or alytarch in Ephesus. In the second half of the rescript the emperors warned Festus that this permission to sponsor festivities (ll. 8–9: *c[ele]brandae editionis*/ l. 23: λειτουργεῖν) in a city that was not one's own did not mean that these liturgists could neglect their own city and become members of another *curia*. In order to avoid a drain of notables from the local *curiae*, men could raise their ambitions to a higher level only after fulfilling all their duties on the local level.

This rescript is traditionally understood as dealing with one type of games, either athletic or Roman-style games. There are, however, three major problems with this thesis. Schulten, Moretti, and most recently Lehner all interpreted this inscription as offering late evidence for the *Koina Asias*, the games of the provincial *koinon* of Asia, organized in several cities.[48] This theory is based on two assumptions (or actually one assumption used in two ways): that the (late-antique) provincial assemblies involved athletic games, and that the *Koina Asias* contests took place during the (imperial and late-antique) provincial assemblies. There is no evidence for either. The feast of the assembly is described in this rescript as a procession, which was a typical part of most feasts. Since this procession

[46] IK Ephesos 43. The commentary announced here never appeared, so the only available commentary is the earlier edition of Schulten 1906: 61–70.

[47] L. 2–3: *Honorem Asiae ac totius provinci[a]e dignitatem, quae ex iudicantis pendebat arbitrio, [exe]mplo Illyri[c]i a[d]que Italarum urbium recte perspexi[mus] esse firmatum*. "We saw to it that the honor of Asia and the dignity of the whole province, which depended on the decision of he who judges (i.e. a non-specified provincial official), was regulated in a good manner, after the example of Illyricum and the cities of Italy."

[48] Schulten 1906: 65–66, Moretti 1954: 288, and Lehner 2004: 164–65. Friesen 1999: 286–87 also hints at the possibility.

is called a heavy liturgy, there were no doubt also free food and sideshows, but whether these were shows of acrobats, mimes, pantomimes, musicians, gladiatorial shows, staged hunts, horse races, demonstration matches of Greek athletes, or actual athletic games, or any combination of the above, cannot be deduced from the text. Neither is it certain that the *Koina Asias* were ever held for the occasion of the assemblies. The different contests as known from earlier inscriptions had in each city their own quadrennial rhythm and place on the calendar. The evidence therefore allows for a more independent organization by the cities. Even if *Koina Asias* contests were indeed linked to provincial assemblies in the first to third centuries, the theory does not take late-antique organizational changes into account.

Under Diocletian, the old province of Asia was divided into seven new provinces, one of which was again called Asia, and became part of the Asian diocese. As the new province of Asia was a lot smaller, the provincial assembly had to be reorganized. Late-antique assemblies, known by their Latin name *concilia*, kept some offices of the earlier *koina*, such as the asiarchy (syriarchy, bithyniarchy, etc.), but not necessarily with exactly the same function.[49] While earlier inscriptions attest asiarchs in many cities, this inscription places an asiarch in Ephesus alone (l. 22: ἐν τῇ Ἐφεσιών μητρόπολει μόνῃ). If there used to be a set order for cities to host the assembly, this order was interrupted when the province shrank. This is confirmed by the rescript: in the years preceding 372, the assembly and its festivities depended on the whim of a provincial magistrate, hence the need of new regulations. Similarly, the schedule of the *Koina Asias* would have been interrupted as well. Of the eight cities that used to organize *Koina Asias*, four (Cyzicus, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea) no longer belonged to the province. The thesis that the rescript deals with the old *Koina Asias* is, in other words, weak.

The traditional interpretation presupposes, moreover, that '*coronatus* of the province' was another term for asiarch. A German translation of the inscription therefore describes the *coronatus* as 'the asiarch in his capacity as priest'.[50] This gloss is based on Schulten's assumption from 1906 that the *coronatus* (translated in the Greek version as τὸν κοσμούμενον ὑπὸ τοῦ τῆς

[49] Deininger 1965: 60, 183–88. For the offices of asiarch and syriarch, see e.g. *Cod. Theod*. 15.9.2 (409); for the bithyniarch see Haenel 1857: no. 1117, i.e. a law preserved in the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon (Session 13.27) in connection with the status of Nicaea (translation in Price and Gaddis 2005: III.30) (372).

[50] Translation of IK Ephesus 43, on the basis of the Latin text: "ein Kranzträger der Provinz (d.h. der Asiarch in priesterlicher Funktion)." This German translation is not always accurate, in particular for l. 9: *ne suae civitatis obliti eius, in qua ediderint munera, curiae socientur*. The Latin states that, while forgetting about their own city, the liturgists could not join the *curia* of the city where they performed the *munus*. The German translation, on the other hand, suggests that they could join the

Ἀσίας στεφάνου) should be identified with the ἀρχιερεύς Ἀσίας from earlier inscriptions, who is often identified with the asiarch.[51] I will not enter in the discussion about the second identification, which is still debated.[52] It should be observed, however, that the office of *archiereus* is only attested for the pre-Diocletian *koinon* and not afterwards. Priests of the imperial cult still existed on the provincial level in the fourth century, in a more or less secularized form, but they were not necessarily the exact same offices as before.[53] There is no doubt that the office of *coronatus* was such a priestly office. The term comes from the provincial cult in the West: in an early third-century inscription a man is called priest of the altar of our emperor and *coronatus* of the Dacii.[54] In the Ephesian inscription, the *coronatus* paid for festivities at the annual provincial assembly and wore a crown while acting in this capacity – as officials of all kinds of festivities did. The office of *coronatus* was therefore obviously comparable to that of *archiereus* and asiarch, but that does not mean that it was the same office. There may well have been several provincial priesthoods. If *archiereus* was just another name for the asiarch, one would expect that it would simply disappear in a period of change, instead of being replaced by yet another synonym. The rescript in fact makes more sense if the *coronatus* and the asiarch were two different officials. The *coronatus* was appointed in turn by each of the four *metropoleis*. Rich councilors of other, smaller towns hence could not become *coronatus*, but could become asiarch in Ephesus. If this automatically meant that he was *coronatus* at Ephesus too, he would interrupt the four-year schedule of the *metropoleis*. This would again cause inequalities between the cities, as the replaced *metropolis* would have to pay less and would gain less honor, while it was exactly the point of the rescript to spread the expenses and benefits evenly. The arrangement proposed by the emperors works better if the *coronatus* and the asiarch presented different festivities: the *coronatus* the festivities of the annual assembly, the asiarch the provincial games in the capital. These provincial games of the asiarch were *venationes*, as is well attested for the syriarch in

other *curia*: "daß sie nicht ihre Heimatstadt vergessen, wenn sie in die Kurie der Stadt eintreten, in der sie die Veranstaltungen ausgerichtet haben."

[51] Schulten 1906: 66–68 even sees this inscription as indisputable proof for the identification of the *archiereus* with the asiarch.

[52] E.g. Friesen 1999, Engelmann 2000, and Weiß 2002.

[53] Cf. *Cod. Theod.* 15.5.1, from the same year as IK Ephesos 43 and dealing with the whims of high government officials and the problems of liturgists for festivities as well. This law describes the liturgies as "games held by magistrates and priests" (*magistratus* [sic] *et sacerdotiorum editiones*). See also Deininger 1965: 184–85.

[54] CIL III 1433 (238/244): *sacerdos arae Aug(usti) n(ostri) coronatus Dac(iarum) III*.

Antioch. In earlier inscriptions, asiarchs are also connected with Roman-style games (never with *agones*), particularly with gladiator fights, but in the fourth century these had lost popularity to the *venationes*.[55]

The third problem, and the most relevant to the present study, concerns the last office of provincial importance mentioned in the rescript, namely the alytarchy. If the whole rescript is understood as dealing with only one set of games, instead of three different kinds, the historical importance of this detail for the history of Greek athletics cannot be understood correctly. The alytarchy was typical of Olympic games. Most Greek contests were presided over by an *agonothetes*, but in Olympia the contest president was replaced at an early stage by a board of *hellenodikai*, and therefore the office of *agonothetes* was lacking there. The alytarch, originally a liturgist paying the wages of the guards, gradually filled this gap in the early imperial age and became an Olympic contest president. Alytarchs at non-Olympic contests are rare.[56] They are not attested for *Koina Asias*, and would certainly be out of place at *venationes*. The office is well attested, however, for the *Olympia* of Ephesus.[57] The alytarch in the inscription of 372 can therefore be no one else but the president of the Ephesian *Olympia*. These had always been one of the most important contests of the city, and by incorporating them in the financial plan of the provincial festivities, the emperors now acknowledged them as the main athletic games of the province.

This upgrade, however, also suggests a decline of the other athletic games in the city. The need for imperial advice on the financing of festivities suggests that, across the province, there were problems. The Olympic games from 372 onward could benefit from wealthy alytarchs from outside of Ephesus, but *agonothetai* for the other Ephesian contests are not mentioned. This implies that other contests were considered less important. If they still existed, they did not receive financial support.

The Ephesian Olympics, on the other hand, survived the fourth century. An almost 60-m long gallery on the *Embolos* is commonly referred to

[55] Carter 2004, focusing mostly on gladiators, which are best represented in imperial-age inscriptions. Friesen 1999: 286–87 thinks asiarchs were "a special category of agonothete" for "sacred games of various kinds." His use of the term 'sacred' hints at athletic games, but there are no attestations of asiarchs presiding these. This is the same for the syriarch; see Liebeschuetz 1959.

[56] Remijsen 2009c: 130–39. Non-Olympic alytarchs are only attested at the Pythian games of Side and Hierapolis, cf. IK Side 134 and SEG LIII 1464. The alytarch of Antioch, the only other example of a late-antique alytarch, is clearly an Olympic president.

[57] IK Ephesos 502, 502A, 523, 728, 1099, 1114–1118, 1120, 1121, 1153, 3055, 4413. Some of these texts also mention the eternal *agonothetes* Tib. Claudius Nysios, but this was the long-deceased initiator of the games who had donated lands as agonistic fund, not the acting president. For Nysios see IK Ephesos 1010 and for his donation see Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 1, l. 41–42.

as the 'stoa of the *alytarches*'. This name is derived from a fragmentary building inscription on an architrave on the east end of the gallery. It says, in letters of the early fifth century, – κ]αὶ ἀλυτάρχου τὸ ἔργον ἐγένετο ☧. This inscription refers to a phase of extensive rebuilding between circa 400 and 440. The *terminus post quem* is the reign of Arcadius (395–408), whose coins were found under the large mosaic that was laid out in this construction phase. The *terminus ante quem* is the proconsulate of Flavius Heliodorus (439–441), as a rescript of this proconsul was set up in the gallery afterwards. As two notables who received a statue in front of the gallery can be placed about 410, the reconstruction should probably be dated around this time.[58] It is not clear from the inscription whether the alytarch in the genitive was the father of the benefactor, or served as a date, but it was obviously still a well-known office. Around 410 some prominent citizens were apparently still proud that they paid the expenses for the Olympics, even those who identified themselves as Christians with a christogram.

The end of the Olympics should be placed in the 420s, as the stadium stopped being maintained in this decade. Shortly after 423, the running track became covered with a layer rich in ceramics and coins.[59] The city retained a lively entertainment sector, however. This is shown by a series of acclamations about the circus colors dating from the sixth and seventh centuries.[60] As Ephesus did not have a circus, these factions operated in the theater, which remained in use after the *agones* had disappeared. The monumental building was damaged by the earthquake about 360, but partially restored. Late-antique theaters usually presented shows with mimes and pantomimes; in Ephesus, there were also *orchestopalarii* (pantomimes specialized in a dance inspired by wrestling moves) belonging to the Green faction.[61]

Athletics in Aphrodisias

With the division of Asia into smaller provinces by Diocletian, Aphrodisias became the capital of Caria.[62] The general picture is comparable to that of Ephesus: by the end of the third century, agonistic monuments were no

[58] For a full discussion of this stoa see Quatember, Scheibelreiter, and Sokolicek 2009, with Abb. 12 for the inscription (IK Ephesos 447). The identification of adjacent rooms as *Amtslokale* of contest presidents (128–29) seems far-fetched. For the date see also Ladstätter and Steskal 2009.

[59] Karwiese 1994: 21.

[60] IK Ephesos 1190–1198.

[61] IK Ephesos 2949. This fashion seems to have spread from Italy in the third century AD. The inscription is undated, but the mention of the Green faction suggests a date between the late fifth and early seventh century. For other references to *orchestopala* see Slater 1990.

[62] All inscriptions of Aphrodisias have been brought together in an excellent online edition at http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007/index.html, referred to as IAph2007.

longer erected. The existing monuments initially remained in their original locations, but in the mid fourth century some were reused in the city walls.[63] Other agonistic images remained visible in the late-antique city, however. Two statues of boxers and their bases were found in situ in the theater, which had been adapted for fights between gladiators since the second century and was suitable for demonstration matches of combat sports as well. These agonistic monuments may be the latest set up in the city: the inscriptions on the bases are uncharacteristically short for *periodonikai*, not following the earlier fashion of listing the major victories, and the letter style suggests late third or even early fourth century.[64]

A monument for the athlete Aurelius Achilles remained in situ in the Hadrianic baths, which were intensively used in late antiquity.[65] On one side of the base, the names of the Olympic and Pythian games were erased. This should not, however, be understood as a Christian protest against the ongoing games of Aphrodisias, as the erasures may date from the sixth or seventh century when the games were long gone. In those areas of Aphrodisias that were frequented in the Byzantine period, there are more such erasures. On an inscription close to Achilles' monument, for example, the word ἀρχιερεύς was removed. Likewise, the pagan name of the city was frequently erased after it was renamed Stauropolis in the seventh century.[66]

The eastern *spendone* of the stadium was converted into a small amphitheater for *venationes* in late antiquity. Since a coin of Honorius (393–423) was embedded in the gravel filling the gap between the new high wall around the arena and the lower seats of the original stadium, this amphitheater was constructed at the earliest in the 390s. It was certainly finished in the first quarter of the century: an early fifth-century coin hoard – the latest coins are from 408 – was buried in a refuge in the north side of the arena wall. The amphitheater was built over the starting lines of the stadium and shortened the running track by 20 m, effectively rendering it useless. Games can not have taken place here after circa 400. Therefore, late-antique inscriptions, mostly of the Blues and the Greens, are found only on the seats incorporated in the amphitheater.[67]

[63] Roueché 1993: nos. 50, 54, 56, 58, 59, 63, 66–68, 70, 76, 89, and 92.
[64] Nos. 532 and 547 on the Oxford *Last Statues of Antiquity* website: http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk/. The statues look at least half a century older than the inscriptions, and were repaired. It is unclear whether the statues were reused, or the bases recut when set up on the stage; in other words, we do not know whether the commemorated athletes date from circa 300, or the monument setting. Newby 2005: 257–60 and Van Voorhis 2008.
[65] IAph2007 5.214. [66] Jones 1981: 126–27. The inscription with ἀρχιερεύς is IAph2007 5.301.
[67] Welch 1998: 565–69; Smith and Ratté 2000: 225–26.

One of the last athletes who may have competed in the unaltered stadium is Elpidianus, who is known from a list of donors – all belonging to the Jewish community – dated to the second half of the fourth century.[68] Besides his religious preference not much else is known about him. The list identifies most donors by their profession or function; most of them are councillors or artisans, one is a type of comedian (γρύλλος). Elpidianus is identified as ἀθλη(τής); the lack of a title and of councillor status suggests he was probably not a big star. The social context suggests he belonged neither to the elite nor to the lowest strata of society.

The fifth-century governor Dulcitius was honored with three epigrams for the renovation of the pool and garden of the 'Portico of Tiberius'. In the third epigram, Dulcitius is called *agonothetes* and *maioumarch*.[69] The latter function, 'organizer of a Maiouma', was added after composition, without regard to the length of the line and the meter. The former function was included in the original epigram, however. In modern scholarship, the term *agonothetes* is sometimes used for presidents of all kinds of games, including circus races, but in antiquity it was typical of Greek-style contests. Hence it is rare in late-antique texts, except in agonistic metaphors. Because Dulcitius is honored with an epigram, one could assume an inventive poetic use of the term, as an archaic equivalent for a contemporary word.[70] The first line of the poem sounds hardly poetic, however: τὸν καὶ ἀγωνοθέτην καὶ κτίστην καὶ φιλότιμον καὶ Μαιουμάρχην. Moreover, another late fifth- or early sixth-century inscription, not metrical, describes governor Vitianus as *agonothetes* as well.[71] This indicates that the office of *agonothetes* still existed in fifth-century Aphrodisias. The second inscription was set up in the theater, implying that the *agonothetes* presided over an *agon* for performing artists. In the late second century, Aphrodisias had at least two strictly musical contests, the *Lysimachea* and the *Callicrateia*. In the mid third-century *Valeriana Pythia*, the musical competition had an important place as well.[72] For a full athletic program the accommodations no longer existed in the fifth century.

A building inscription from the odeon records works on a palaistra in the mid fifth century. As noted before, the construction of new palaistras had already stopped in the third century. The odeon was, moreover, too small to contain training grounds. The building inscription evidently does

[68] IJO II 14 B. [69] IAph2007 4.202 = Roueché 1993: 65.

[70] E.g. *Anthologia Planudea* 371, l. 6: στεψάμενοι σταδίοις εἶσαν ἀγωνοθέτην. The epigram deals with circus races circa 500, but uses a vocabulary reminiscent of athletic victories.

[71] IAph2007 8.273. [72] For the contests of Aphrodisias see Roueché 1993: 161–88.

not use the word 'palaistra' in its original sense of 'wrestling grounds'. Already in the imperial bath–gymnasium complexes, palaistras served as multifunctional spaces for fervent athletes as well as more playful amateurs. Less sports-minded gymnasium visitors would hang out in the galleries to stroll, watch, and chat. Since the palaistra was the largest space in many of these gymnasium complexes, it was also ideal for demonstrations by famous guests, be it demonstration matches of athletic champions or lectures by renowned speakers. When athletic training became less popular in the third and fourth centuries, this function as a stage for demonstrations naturally became more important. This was a function a palaistra shared with an odeon, which, though originally meant as a concert hall, could equally serve as a lecture hall or as a stage for certain shows. Roueché proposes two possible translations for 'palaistra' as applied to the odeon.[73] The first is 'school'. This metaphoric use is indeed attested in Greek literature.[74] Inscriptions of the circus colors inside the odeon show, however, that it had more than an educational function alone. The second translation of Roueché is 'place of competition'. I would broaden this to 'place of demonstrations', which lies close to the normal function of a palaistra.

It is possible that some athletic matches were still staged in the odeon, however. In the area to the north of it, archaeologists found a marble storage-jar inscribed with the name of its owner, Polychronios the boxer.[75] On the basis of the letters and a Christian cross, it has been dated roughly to the fourth to sixth century. The explicit identification of this man as a boxer shows that athletes were still living in Aphrodisias in the Christian period, and were able to make some money with this profession, although the city no longer had its own athletic *agon*.

Athletics in the rest of Asia Minor

Ephesus and Aphrodisias are both located in western Asia Minor. In the rest of this area, athletics seems also to have remained fairly popular in the first half of the fourth century. Most evidence is textual, but in 2000 a late athletic mosaic was found in the absis of a 200-m^2 room in Akmoneia, a small town on the road from Sardis to the Anatolian plateau.[76] Although stratigraphic details are missing, multiple stylistic elements (the use of glass tesserae, inscribed monumental prize crowns, the way the belly is rendered) point to a date in the first half of the fourth century.[77] The central rectangle

[73] Roueché 1989: 79. [74] Plutarch, *Demetrius* 5; Choricius 32.104. [75] IAph2007 2.313.
[76] Bohne 2011: K80. [77] Bohne 2011: 519–20.

depicted three pairs of athletes: boxers, wrestlers, and presumably pankratiasts. The boxers are named as the Alexandrians Serapham(mon) and Deidas, who are known from Pausanias as the Olympic finalists of AD 125.[78] It is not uncommon for mosaics to depict historical athletes recorded in literature rather than contemporary champions[79], but in this case the choice is admittedly an odd one, for Pausanias tells how the boxing final between Sarapammon and Deidas was tainted by bribery. These men may, however, have left more glorious memories in Asia. After all they were the best boxers of their generation – they would not have made it to the Olympic finals otherwise. The other duos on the mosaic were also identified as famous athletes, but their names are not legible today – for soon after its discovery, the mosaic was stolen.

Above the central rectangle, and to the sides of it, three more scenes were fitted in the absis: at the top a prize-table, to the right a female personification of *gymnasiarchia*, and to the left a personification of *agonothesia*. The latter holds a monumental crown with the inscription AKTIA. The mosaic suggests, therefore, the continuity of the nearest Actian games, which are those of Hierapolis, into the early fourth century. That the only other full-figure representation of Agonothesia also comes from Hierapolis (namely on the agonistic theater frieze) confirms this identification.

In a letter of 364, Libanius described Ionia as known for producing athletic champions.[80] The presence of athletes from Sardis and Tenedos on the bronze tablet from Olympia as Olympic victors of 321 and 337 confirms this for the first half of the fourth century. Also the last two late-antique athletic champions known by name are from western Asia: Philoumenos of Philadelphia and John of Smyrna. They exceptionally received statues in Rome in the 370s and 380s respectively. Of John's career as a wrestler we know next to nothing, as the inscription is written in a typically late-antique, vague and poetic language: "John, unbeaten wrestler from Smyrna. On account of his merits in strength and virtue combined, this sculpted athlete, excelling in his art, has been erected at the command of the invincible emperors our lords Flavii Valentinanus, Theodosius, and

[78] Pausanias 5.21.15. Although Pausanias says that they originated from the Arsinoite nome, the inscription calls them Alexandrians (as anticipated in Remijsen 2009a: n. 13). This is not a problematic discrepancy (as suggested by Bohne 2011: 514–15), but a consequence of the genre difference between Pausanias' prose and honorary monuments: most Egyptian athletes came from minor provincial towns (which is, as a non-glorious detail, purposefully added to Pausanias' derogatory account) but competed as Alexandrians (which is normally the only citizenship mentioned in official accounts).

[79] E.g. Bohne 2011: K85b.

[80] *Ep.* 1180.

Arcadius. John has deserved that he, being strong among all, should be seen by the location of the statue."[81] His name 'John' (Ἰωάνης) suggests that he came from a Christian family.

Philoumenos was an expert in all combat sports (wrestling, boxing, *pankration*, and *pammachon*) and is said to have won all athletic contests in the Empire: "The lords and emperors Valentian, Valens, and Gratian, eternal Augusti, judge that Philoumenos, who was victorious in all athletic contests from East to West, in pammachon, wrestling, pankration, and with his fists, i.e. in boxing, is worthy of eternal glory, by the location of his statue in the headquarters of the athletic association, which all the members of the association have gratefully accepted. The senate and the Roman people unanimously present him with great applause."[82] He is moreover the only late-antique athlete known from more than one source. An appendix to the Olympic victor list of Eusebius, added by the person – presumably the monk Panodoros – who copied this list about 400, contains some short anecdotes on famous athletes not mentioned in the list. Most were quasi-legendary figures from the archaic and classical period, but one was a contemporaneous champion: "There was also in the time of Theodosius the Great a wrestler from Philadelphia in Lydia, Philoumenos by name. He is said to have struck a bronze statue and to have smashed the bronze deep inward where he struck it. And on it there was an epigram, the last line of which is: The bronze is far weaker than my hand."[83]

Decline set in in the second half of the century, however. The privileged position of the Ephesian Olympics in the imperial rescript of 372 implies that the rest of the Ephesian games were already on the wane.[84] The primacy of the Olympics in fact also suggests a decline of games in the other cities of the province: men of smaller cities sponsored the games in Ephesus and not the other way around. The rescript contains no measures to guarantee the organization of athletic games outside the provincial and

[81] CIL VI 10153 = IGUR I 245 (384–392): Ἰωάνης παλαιστὴς Σμυρναῖος/ ἄπτωτος *ob fortitudinis merita et virtutis cumulum hoc quod excellens artis robur exegit praecepto invictissimorum principum d (ominorum) n(ostrorum) Fl(aviorum) Valentiniani, Theodosii et Arcadii. Iohannes meruit ut inter omnis pollens locatione statuae videatur*. For examples and characteristics of honorary inscriptions from the same period in Rome, see Bauer 2007: 82–86.

[82] CIL VI 10154 (367–375): *Filumenum. D(omini) et Principes n(ostri) Valentinian(us) Valens et Gratianus semper Aug(usti) Filumenum in omni aclhetico certamine ab Oriente ad Occidente(m) usq (ue) victorem pammacho, lucta, prancati(o) cestibusq(ue) id est pygme locatione statuae in acletarum curia aeternitatis gloria dignum esse iudicarunt, quod omnes xystici gratanter acceperunt. Sen(atus) pariter simulq(ue) P(opulus) R(omanus) ingenti fabore prosecutus est. Philoumenos.*

[83] Eusebius, *Chronica* App. See Christesen and Martirosova-Torlone 2006: 39 (Panodoros), 82 (edition), 93 (translation).

[84] IK Ephesos 43.

diocesan capital. They were either considered unimportant, or had already disappeared. This evolution is confirmed by excavations at Aizanoi in Phrygia, likewise in the diocese of Asia. The local stadium may still have been in use in the early fourth century, but the discovery of no fewer than sixteen coins struck between 351 and 361 between already half-spoliated parts of the construction suggests that the stadium was intensively used as a quarry circa 360.[85]

For Bithynia, where the agonistic circuit was closely connected to that on the other side of the Bosporus, we can perhaps assume an evolution linked to Constantinople. There is no fourth-century evidence, but there is an explicit anecdote in the *Life of Hypatios*, written in the later fifth or sixth century.[86] About 435, Leontios, *praefectus urbi* of Constantinople, wanted to renew the (local) Olympic games in Chalcedon. These games had been abolished, according to the *Life*, "by the emperors of before and by Constantine, who deserves eternal commemoration." Hypatios protested against the renewal and asked his fellow monks to come with him, if they were willing to die for God. First, however, he went to the bishop Eulalios, who told him to sit and be quiet, because this was an affair for a bishop and not for a monk. Hypatios, however, said that he would go to the governor the next day and pull him down from his chair, because the Christian crowd would be worshipping idols out of ignorance. The governor heard about the planned protest and fled to Constantinople, pretending to be sick.

That the contest was abolished by Constantine is not credible. The first Christian emperor was strongly idealized after his death and all kinds of anti-pagan measures were attributed to him. It is not even likely that Chalcedon had Olympic games, since third-century inscriptions mention only Pythian games.[87] In 435 Chalcedon apparently had not had an *agon* for a while. The reference to a specific and identifiable official in this unparalleled anecdote does suggest that it refers to a historical proposal for the reintroduction of games. The major point of interest of this anecdote is the attitude of three different groups in society toward athletic games in the reign of Theodosius II.[88]

Cappadocia and Galatia began to overshadow the coastal cities in political importance in the fourth century, because of their location along the highway between Constantinople and Antioch.[89] This region never had such a strong agonistic tradition as the rest of Asia Minor. However, the

[85] von Mosch 1993: 471. [86] Callinicus, *Vita Hypatii* (SC 177) 33. Cf. PLRE II: 669 (Leontius 9).
[87] CIG 3676. [88] This will be further discussed in Chapter 8 (pp. 192ff.).
[89] Mitchell 1993: II.88.

writings of the Cappadocian fathers contain many agonistic images. Such metaphors were often little more than literary play by classically schooled authors, but when Gregory of Nyssa in the second half of the century began such a metaphor with "Indeed we see this happening even now at the contests" he did assume that at least some members of his audience had personal experience with athletics.[90] His brother Basil of Caesarea blamed members of local elite for spending their money on games to obtain a fleeting honor and applause, rather than giving it to the poor. He lists several types of entertainments in the theater, namely pankratiasts, mimes, and *venatores*, whose very sight should disgust a person.[91] The inclusion of pankratiasts in the theater among reviled performers such as mimes and *venatores* suggests that these competed outside the agonistic circuit. Basil's agonistic metaphors sometimes go beyond the usual commonplaces, referring to details such as the slowing down of runners when making their turn halfway through the *diaulos*, which may suggest that he had at some point personally attended such contests.[92] Most of all, however, the Cappadocian fathers complained about the attraction of the people to horse races. This enthusiasm for the races probably came from Cilicia and Syria, for in the rest of Asia Minor, there is remarkably little evidence for horse racing. If they were held there, it was on makeshift racetracks, since monumental circuses were never constructed there.[93] As in many other regions in the Empire, horse racing had in Cappadocia clearly surpassed athletics.

[90] Gregory of Nyssa, *In inscriptiones psalmorum* 73 (ed. McDonough 1986): ὅπερ δὴ καὶ νῦν ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσιν ὁρῶμεν γινόμενον.

[91] Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia in illud: Destruam horrea mea* 3 (ed. Courtonne 1935): Οὐχ ὁρᾷς τοὺς ἐν τοῖς θεάτροις, παγκρατιασταῖς, καὶ μίμοις, καὶ θηριομάχοις τισὶν ἀνθρώποις, οὓς κἂν βδελύξαιτό τις προσιδεῖν, ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐν ὀλίγῳ τιμῆς, καὶ τῶν παρὰ τοῦ δήμου θορύβων καὶ κρότων τὸν πλοῦτον προϊεμένους;

[92] *De spiritu sancto* (SC 17bis) 15.35 (= 129A). Cf. Albanidis, Kasabalis, and Kassaris 2011: 4–8.

[93] Humphrey 1986: 525–28.

CHAPTER 3

Syria

The agonistic tradition

Greek athletics was first brought to Syria by the army of Alexander the Great, who twice organized games in Tyre in honor of Herakles. The initial impact of the new custom seems to have been minor and limited to the Phoenician coast: at the end of the third century BC, Diotimos from Sidon won the four-horse chariot-race of the *Nemea*, and the Tyrian games for Herakles became permanent and quadrennial. There are some indications that the Seleucids also tried to stimulate Greek athletics in the far East in the late third century. At the request of Antiochos III, a contest was instituted by a Seleucid official on the island of Icarus, in the Persian Gulf near the mouth of the Euphrates. Ai Khanoum in Bactria exceptionally had a gymnasium by the third or early second century (see Map 3).[1]

In the second century BC, athletics gained a stronger foothold in Syria: Phoenician champions competed in Athens and Cos; the hellenophile high priest Jason built a gymnasium in Jerusalem about 174 and dispatched athletes to the games at Tyre; extravagant games (not only an *agon*, but shows with gladiators and wild animals as well) were organized in 166 in Daphne near Antioch by Antiochos IV; gymnasia and games were now more commonly established further inland, for example in Babylon; and an athlete from Seleucia on the Tigris won the Olympic *stadion* race in 100.[2]

A new wave of interest followed in the early Empire. In Judea, king Herod the Great gave gymnasia to several cities (e.g. Damascus) and a multifunctional entertainment building and quadrennial *agon* to Caesarea Maritima. He organized an *agon* in Jerusalem too, which was meant to be quadrennial, but it is not clear whether this contest survived the Jewish

[1] Arrian, *Anabasis* 2.25.6; 3.6.1; IAG 41; SEG XXXV 1476. Cf. Groß-Albenhausen 2007: 313–14.

[2] Jason: 2 Maccabees 4.10–20; Antiochos IV: Polybius 30.25–26; Phoenician athletes: Moretti 1953: 109–10; gymnasia: van der Spek 2005; Olympic victor 100 BC: Eusebius, *Chronica* Ol. 170 (ed. Christesen and Martirosova-Torlone 2006).

Map 3 Map of Syria.

protests.[3] There were certainly permanent games in Antioch by the first century AD, among them the games of the *koinon* of Syria, Cilicia, and Phoenicia. At the time, Antiochene athletes, such as Nero's favorite Patrobios, belonged to the cream of international champions.[4] The client kingdom Commagene, north of Syria, organized a contest in the reign of Claudius.[5]

Most cities in the region, however, started to celebrate games only in the second century AD.[6] From victory lists it can be deduced that by the reign

[3] Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 1.21.8; 11; *Antiquitates Judaicae* 15.8.1; 16.5.1–2. For the Herodian dynasty and games see also Hübner 1992: 114–16 and Lämmer 1973, 1974, 1976, and 1981–1982. For the building in Caesarea see Humphrey 1996: 121–23.

[4] *Suppl.Epig.Rodio* 66a (1st. AD: Καισάρεια ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ); IGUR I 249 = IAG 65 (circa AD 60: Patrobios won ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τῇ π[ατρίδι]); I.Napoli I 50 = IAG 67 (circa 90: κοινὸν Συρίας Κιλικίας Φοινείκης ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ). The story about Sosibios in Malalas 10.20 (ed. Thurn 2000) and certainly that about Claudius in 10.27 should be taken with a grain of salt, cf. Remijsen 2010a: 429.

[5] P.Lond. III 1178, l. 20–25 = Pap.Agon. 6.

[6] The upsurge in the second century may be exaggerated by changes in the evidence – previously, victory inscriptions were less numerous and agonistic coins uncommon – but the fact that, in the late first and early second centuries, Syrian athletes (IAG 65, 67) or athletes who traveled to Syria (IAG 68, 69) mention Antioch alone, while later inscriptions mention many more contests, does show that the local contest circuit expanded considerably.

of Septimius Severus *agones* were certainly held at more than twenty cities in Syria and almost ten in Cilicia.[7] Most of these games had a regional profile. Many of them are known only from a single victory inscription for Aurelius Septimius Eirenaios, an athlete from Laodicea, who started competing as a boy in the late second century and continued as an adult in the early third.[8] As a boy, he won the boxing competition of the *Aktia* and other sacred contests, but as an adult he was less successful. He reached the high point of his adult career when he lost in the final of the winter *Nemea*. The inscription gives the exact date (December 30, 214) and explains that this contest belonged to the traditional *periodos*, to contextualize the importance of this second place. The only contests he won on his western tour were those of Tarentum and Patras. As he was not really a match for the real international champions, he focused on minor games in his own region, many of which he won two or three times. Here his competitors were mostly other athletes from Syria and Cilicia, some Egyptians, and the occasional contender from Asia Minor.[9] The international champions, if they traveled so far south, came to Syria only in the fourth year of the Olympiad for the games of Antioch, making some stops along the Phoenician coast, at Tyre, and perhaps Sidon and Damascus. In Cilicia, they competed in Anazarbus and Tarsus.[10]

[7] Bru 2007 collects most evidence for *agones* in imperial-age Syria, but does not always seem to have interpreted it correctly. Hübner 1992: 111–24 collects the Hellenistic and imperial-age material for the Palestinian region. The Cilician evidence is brought together by Ziegler 1985: esp. 127–29. The following cities are known to have had games in Syria in the reign of Septimius Severus: from south to north, Gaza, Ascalon, Arabian Philadelphia, Neapolis, Gerasa, Caesarea Maritima, Scythopolis, Caesarea Panias, Tyre, Damascus, Sidon, Beirut, Tripolis, Leukas, Apamea, Laodicea, Chalcis, Antioch, Beroia, Hierapolis, and Zeugma; in Cilicia: from east to west, Hieropolis–Kastabala, Anazarbus, Aigeai, Mopsuestia, Adana, Tarsus, and Soloi–Pompeiopolis. The contests on Cyprus, at Salamis, and Kition, were attached to this circuit. See IAG 72, 81, 85, and (for Gerasa) SEG VII 825 and IGR III 1371. Coins show that in the course of the third century, Bostra, Heliopolis, and Emesa in Syria, and Soloi–Pompeiopolis Augusta and Mallos in Cilicia, likewise had games, see Bru 2007: 3, 8, 12 and Ziegler 1985: 56–57. For Bostra see also SPP V 74 and, on this text, Wallner 2000.

[8] IAG 85.

[9] In SPP V 54–56, 69–70, and 74 Hermopolitan athletes request the payment of their *opsonia* for victories in Gaza, Bostra, and Sidon. SEG VII 900 (Gerasa) lists several Alexandrians among the victors. PSI XIV 1412 = SB XII 10772 is a letter of an Egyptian athlete competing in Antioch. IK Side 130 honors a man from Side (Pamphylia) who won in southern Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt. The international champion M. Aelius Aurelius Menander of Aphrodisias won many Syrian contests too, during what seems to be a single tour in Syria (IAph2007 12.920).

[10] For the most prestigious games see IAG 78, 86, 87, and 90. Not being an international champion, Eirenaios never won in Anazarbus or Damascus, in Tyre and Tarsus only as a boy, and in Antioch only once (IAG 81). The date in the fourth year of the Olympiad (i.e. all years divisible by four) is known for the Antiochene Olympics and is for earlier Antiochene games clear from chronologically ordered inscriptions (Remijsen 2010b: 418; 426 n. 44), but the Phoenician games fit this schedule as well: the first edition of the *Aktia* of Tyre is securely dated to the second half of 195 or first half of 196 (Bru 2007: 10); SPP V 54–56 dates a celebration of the contest of Sidon in February 264. Some

The expansion of the agonistic circuit in Syria and Cilicia can be linked to military expeditions in the region. The conflict between Septimius Severus and Pescennius Niger offers a good example. Cities that had supported the prevailing emperor received an upgrade in status and saw their requests for new games granted. Tyre, for example, received the title of colony and a second contest, the *Aktia*.[11] Laodicea became *metropolis* of Syria and started celebrating *Kapitolia*. At the site of the final victory over Pescennius Niger, Kodrigai (Quadrigae) in the Cilician mountains, Septimius founded *Severeia Olympia*, co-organized by Anazarbus and Tarsus, which both received the title *neokoros*.[12] Antioch, on the other hand, which had supported Niger, lost its city status and right to celebrate games. It had at the time three contests, the *agon* of Eukrates, the *Hadrianeia*, and the *Kommodeios agon*. After the rehabilitation in 198, only the first two seem to have been re-established; the third had no doubt been abandoned because of Commodus' *damnatio memoriae*.[13] Because of the recurring conflicts between competitors to the throne and expeditions against the Persians in the third century, the soldier emperors too spent a lot of time in Syria and Cilicia, with an army in need of supplies. To keep the cities on their side, they likewise granted them favors such as the introduction or an upgrade of a contest. This is well established for Cilicia, but is equally true for Syria.[14]

There was in Syria a strong tendency to connect the Greek games with local religion and practices. In Tyre, the main contest was organized in honor of the traditional patron Melqart, under his Greek name Herakles. It was upgraded under Commodus, when it was renamed *Herakleia Kommodeia*.[15] The contest at Sidon was in the third century an *agon* described as ἱερὸς εἰσελαστικὸς οἰκουμενικὸς περιπόρφυρος ἰσολύμπιος.[16] This contest

Cilician games (e.g. *Severeia* in Kastabala, *Olympia* of Adana) seem to have been attached to the Syrian circuit, but the games at Anazarbus and Tarsus probably represented a separate trip (Remijsen 2010b: 426 n. 44). See also Strasser 2000: 612–13.

[11] For the colony status of Tyre see Millar 1993: 123–24. Bru 2007: 9 incorrectly identifies the *Aktia* with the *Herakleia* on the basis of a theory from 1901. The coins with the legends AKT(ια) KOM(όδεια) or ACTIA (H)ERAKLEIA contain two crowns and therefore refer to two games. Cf. Ziegler 1985: 71, n. 31 and Miranda 1993: 68, n. 78.

[12] Ziegler 1985: 22–25, 33–34, 75–85 (*Severeia Olympia*); 147–51 (*Kapitolia*).

[13] Remijsen 2010a: 432–34.

[14] For Cilicia see Ziegler 1985: 71–126. In the second century most Syrian games – except those of the main cities – were mentioned without name or titles, but in the second half of the third century there were many sacred eiselastic games called *Olympia, Aktia, Sebasmia*, etc., implying imperial grants of status. E.g. IAG 90, SPP V 54–56, 69–70, and 74.

[15] Miranda 1993: 85–86. She forgets IAph2007 1.182.

[16] SPP V 54, l. 12–14 – 55, l. 9–10 – 56, l. 8–9, IAG 90 = IG II² 3169/70, l. 30.

'surrounded by purple' referred to the local production of purple dye from sea snails, for which Phoenicia was famous. Possibly, the victors received a purple cloth. In Bostra, the *Aktia Dousaria* were held in honor of Dousares or Dushara, the supreme god of the Nabatean pantheon. That an indigenous Arabian god was referred to directly in the name – and not hidden behind a Greek equivalent – is uncommon. This contest was granted by a local emperor, Philip the Arab, possibly during his stay at Bostra on his way from Persia to Rome.[17]

The Olympic games of Antioch

Most of the above games are known exclusively from victory inscriptions and civic coins. The cessation of these commemoration practices threw a dark shadow over the local circuit. For one contest, however, the late-antique evidence is richer than for any other contest, namely for the Olympic games of Antioch. This famous late-antique *agon* was also, as far as we know, the one that continued longest of all athletic contests in the Mediterranean. With the exception of one third-century inscription[18], this *agon* is in fact known only through late-antique literary sources. For that reason, it has been studied mainly by experts of that period, often with relatively little knowledge of imperial agonistic practices and perhaps too much faith in John Malalas, a sixth-century chronicler who likewise had little insight into these matters. In this way, several misconceptions on the subject have entered the scholarship, in particular concerning the date and manner of the games' introduction, as I have argued elsewhere.[19] I will not repeat these arguments here, but instead give an overview of what is known from the late third century on.

Once the Antiochene Olympics had been introduced in 212, they soon overshadowed the other contests of the city, which are no longer heard of after the mid third century.[20] Like other Olympic games they were held in honor of Zeus, who had had a temple in Daphne since 115, and they were presided over by an alytarch.[21] This official, according to Malalas

[17] Peachin 1991: 334; Bru 2007: 11–12. [18] TAM II 587. [19] Remijsen 2010a: 435–36.

[20] The argument for 212 as the date of introduction rather than 180 is set out in Remijsen 2010a. The last attestation of the *Hadrianeia* and the *agon* of Eukrates is FD III.1 555 (circa 250). Boxing contests still formed part of a feast for Artemis in the later fourth century (Libanius, *Or.* 5.43), but as there were no other competitions, this was not a traditional *agon*.

[21] For the temple of Zeus see Malalas 11.8 (ed. Thurn 2000), who even gives the text of the building inscription. For the alytarch see Remijsen 2009c: esp. 137–38.

(12.7), wore a white robe interwoven with gold and a crown with precious stones,[22] carried an ebony scepter, and slept during his time of office on the ground in the open courtyard of the Kaisareion. His assistants (12.8–9) wore white robes and ceremonial crowns as well: the *grammateus* a golden crown in the form of laurel leaves and the *amphithales* a crown made of (or again in the shape of) laurel leaves with in the middle a small golden bust of Zeus.

As the main contest of Antioch, a provincial and diocesan capital and temporary residence of several tetrarchs, the Antiochene *Olympia* automatically became the most important *agon* of Syria and hence an interesting occasion for imperial self-promotion. Diocletian himself acted as alytarch for the games of 300, and was on this occasion very generous: he had the stadium and temple of Zeus restored and gave gifts to all participants. To the victors he gave *sacrae* (τὰς σάκρας), that is imperial certificates awarding them privileges.[23] As there is no doubt that the Antioch Olympics had had the status of a 'sacred contest' since their introduction, and that the victors could already claim privileges with certificates of the local government, this particular gift could perhaps be explained as an exception to the law, dated between 293 and 305, by which the same Diocletian limited the privileges of *hieronikai* to those who had won at least three *certamina sacra*.[24] Perhaps the victors in Antioch in 300 exceptionally received these privileges for this contest alone. A second tetrarch may also have presided over the games.[25]

Important sources for the Antiochene Olympics in the fourth century are the speeches and letters of Libanius (born 314), who held the chair of

[22] Libanius also refers to the crown in his paraphrases for alytarch. See *Or*. 53.4 on the alytarchy of Phasganios.

[23] Malalas 12.38; 44 (ed. Thurn 2000). [24] *Cod. Iust*. 10.54.1.

[25] Malalas 12.46 (ed. Thurn 2000) says Maximian acted as alytarch, but Maximian was never in Antioch. The chronicler may have made this up as a parallelism: when Diocletian put on the ceremonial cloths of alytarch, Malalas connected this with the emperor taking off his imperial garb and thus with his retirement. An alytarchy for Maximian could therefore serve as an explanation for his retirement. It is also possible that Malalas confused Maximian with Galerius or Maximinus Daia, since he dates the alytarchy after an expedition against the Armenians, which must refer either to Galerius about 298 or to Maximinus Daia about 312. For the whereabouts of the tetrarchs see Barnes 1982: 49–67. Galerius cannot have been alytarch himself (as Bru 2007: 8 proposes), but could have assisted Diocletian in 300; Maximinus could have been alytarch in 312 (cf. Barnes 1982: 66). Libanius, *Or*. 11.269 mentions an unnamed emperor as president of the games (τὸν ἀγῶνα καὶ βασιλεὺς ἔθηκε) and another as ἑλλανοδίκης with a laurel crown. If this refers to the same emperors, the scenario in which Diocletian acted as alytarch and Galerius as his assistant is most likely, since Libanius uses *hellanodikes* normally for judges, who were subordinate to the contest president. The detail of the laurel crown, as attested for the *grammateus* and the *amphithales*, also suggests a subordinate position.

rhetoric in Antioch from about 353 until his death in the 390s, and the works of John Chrysostom (born circa 349), who attended the school of Libanius, but went on to study Christian theology, living in Antioch until he was called to Constantinople in 398. Of those two, the first is the most informative. As a convinced pagan, Libanius was interested in traditional religious practices. Moreover, he came from an aristocratic family, with traditional elite interests including the provision of games. His maternal uncles Panolbios and Phasganios were alytarchs in 328 and 336 respectively.[26] Libanius' speeches and letters are not always easy to understand, however: they are in the first place literary showcases, written in a complex, verbose, and archaizing Attic, consistently avoiding technical terms in favor of classical alternatives or descriptive paraphrases. This obfuscates the practical aspects of the games. Libanius does not, for example, use the official title of the contest president, that is *alytarches*, but replaces this 'modern' word, unattested in classical literature, by *agonothetes*, the even more archaic *athlothetes*, or a paraphrase. This terminological vagueness makes it at times difficult to understand how the people he mentions were precisely involved in the organization of the games.[27] Libanius' work also reveals a love for agonistic metaphors, which was shared by his former pupil.[28] John Chrysostom refers only a few times specifically to the Antiochene Olympics. Nevertheless, he gives more concrete details about some practical aspects in his references than does Libanius – though he does not use the technical term 'alytarch' either.

From both Libanius and John Chrysostom we learn that the registration and preliminary matches for the Olympics took place in Antioch itself, during a thirty-day preparation period, but that the actual contests – perhaps only the finals – and the subsequent crowning of the victors took place about 8 km from the city center in the stadium of Daphne, near the temple of Zeus.[29] Scenes from this contest are depicted on an unfortunately very fragmentary mosaic in the 13-m long corridor of a villa from the 340s at

[26] Libanius, *Or.* 1.2; 13; 10.9; 12; 53.4.

[27] The difficulty of recognizing the alytarchs among all the paraphrases is one reason – besides the ambiguity of Malalas on the point – for the traditional identification of the syriarch as contest president (e.g. Downey 1939: 174–78; Petit 1955: 126–36; Millon and Schouler 1988: 65–66). Despite the reappearance of this idea in later studies, Liebeschuetz 1959 has convincingly shown that the syriarch was only responsible for *venationes*, which did not form part of the Olympics.

[28] All references to athletics in his oeuvre are collected and translated by Koch 2007a.

[29] Libanius, *Ep.* 1183: κἀν τοῖς προάγωσιν ἐν ἄστει κἀν τοῖς μείζοσιν ἐν Δάφνῃ. John Chrysostom, *Hom. 1 in principium actorum* (PG 51) 76: μετὰ γὰρ τὰς τριάκοντα ἡμέρας τὰς ἐνταῦθα ἀναγαγόντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ προάστειον περιάγουσι. Cf. Libanius, *Or.* 11.236; *Ep.* 1179.

Daphne.[30] The preliminary matches of the combat sports were held in the so-called Plethron, presumably a palaistra measuring a plethron (i.e. 100 feet or circa 30 m, in this case probably 30 × 30 m) and surrounded on four sides by stone seats.[31] According to Malalas, the Plethron – he says Plethrin – was constructed in 193, in the reign of Didius Julianus, near the *xystos*, where the other preliminary competitions took place, and the Kaisareion, where the alytarch resided during the games.[32] Originally, it was a fairly simple structure with only two rows of seats, but in 332 and 336, it was enlarged to accommodate more spectators. The proposal for another enlargement in 383–384 by Proklos, a governor whom Libanius did not like, induced him to write an oration (*Or.* 10) against this project.

Antioch actively tried to attract international athletes for its games. Libanius mentions the liturgical office of ὁ τοὺς ἀθλητὰς ἐξ ἅπαντος ἀγείρων μυχοῦ 'he who assembles athletes from each remote corner',[33] which seems to be yet another way of saying 'alytarch'. Elsewhere he says that the contest president (ὁ τὸν ἀγῶνα τιθείς) lured athletes with the prestige of the crown and moreover offered them money – the latter no doubt being the more convincing argument.[34] The alytarch engaged these competitors by sending out ambassadors to other provinces with letters of introduction. Well-connected citizens of Antioch such as Libanius wrote these letters to induce important people there to help the ambassadors. In a series of letters from 364, addressed to governors in Asia Minor and Egypt, Libanius asks them to prompt local athletes to go to Antioch and – more importantly – to procure donkeys and horses for the transport of these athletes and the members of the embassy.[35] In 388, he wrote a similar letter to the iatrosophist Magnus, who had a school in Alexandria, requesting him to act as a go-between in negotiations with the governor.[36] He does not hint at any involvement of the athletic association, which used to have a role in such matters.

[30] Bohne 2011: K83. The date is based on a coin of Constantius II embedded under a mosaic in a different room. The connection with the Olympics is suggested only by the location and is not confirmed by internal details.

[31] Libanius, *Or.* 10.1. See Yegül 2010: 288 for the suggested identification as a palaistra.

[32] Malalas 12.16 (ed. Thurn 2000). [33] *Or.* 31.41. [34] *Ep.* 1180.

[35] *Ep.* 1179–1183. These letters are all dated to 364, mostly on good grounds – e.g. a reference to the death of Julian and the careers of well-known governors – but 1181 seems to be attributed to that year only because of its resemblance to the other letters. The date is problematic as a certain Candidus is presented as paying for the liturgy, while *Ep.* 1167, also dated to 364, discusses the appointment of Alexander as contest president. Celsus too is often named as responsible for the Olympics of 364 (Downey 1939: 174; Petit 1955: 131; Millon and Schouler 1988: 65), but he was syriarch.

[36] *Ep.* 843.

As Libanius was not really a sports fan, he does not tell us about the actual contests. Although he was proud of his city for organizing them, was kept informed on the competition by visitors when he was too sick to attend, held Olympic victories in high esteem, and was quite fond of athletic metaphors as a literary topos, athletics never became an actual topic in his work.[37] He praised victors of the games only when they excelled intellectually too, the latter talent being of greater consequence.[38] Other aspects of the feast incited more interest on the part of the rhetorician. This is a perspective we do not know from the epigraphic and numismatic evidence of the earlier centuries, but was probably how many less sports-minded people in the cities experienced the games throughout Antiquity.

A part of the festival to which Libanius naturally refers several times is the presentation of a speech. It was the duty of the contest president to find orators for the occasion.[39] In 356, during the first Olympics since his return home after his study and early career abroad, Libanius himself gave a speech on the city of Antioch (*Or.* 11).[40] According to Menander's handbook of rhetoric, praise of the city was indeed a typical topic for an oration on the occasion of games.[41] In 364, Libanius claimed to be astonished that Quirinus expected him to give a second speech and noted the possibility that there would be no speech at all, as the games were overshadowed by Julian's untimely death.[42] In 380, Libanius had written a speech, but was too sick or depressed to deliver it. Something similar happened in 384, although this time moral objections to desecrations in Daphne brought him to offer it to Zeus rather than to present it.[43]

The president of the games was further expected to organize a banquet. In the mid fourth century, perhaps during Constans' residence in Antioch,[44] it had become customary that not only the men but their young sons too were invited to this banquet. Decades after this innovation (in the 380s or early 390s), Libanius expressed his objections in a speech (*Or.* 53). He briefly mentions the increased financial pressure on the contest presidents,[45] but his argument focuses on the moral decline. The presence of young boys among drunk adults could lead to promiscuity, as the

[37] See *Or.* 1.139 for updates at his sickbed. In *Or.* 48.42 he charges the members of the council with having done nothing to be proud of, such as winning an Olympic crown.

[38] *Ep.* 1278, 1279 (asking favors for two young men, who had done well in the games and in his rhetorics class), 843 and 1017 (two similar letters proudly mentioning that one of his best students would compete as a runner in the games).

[39] *Or.* 31.47. [40] On this speech see also *Ep.* 36.

[41] Menander Rhetor 365–367 (ed. Russell and Wilson 1981). [42] *Ep.* 1243. [43] *Or.* 1.184; 222.

[44] Thus Martin in his introduction to *Or.* 10 (in Budé edition 1988: 213).

[45] *Or.* 53.9: ποιεῖδὲ καὶ τοῖς ἀγωνοθέταις τοῦτο τῆς λειτουργίας τὸ μέρος χαλεπώτερον.

Olympics "undressed not only the athletes, but the young boy too between the numerous dinner guests."[46] Another innovation was the custom of giving presents to take home. This, however, threatened to make the liturgy of contest president financially unbearable and thus endangered the continuation of the feast. Libanius proudly claimed that this was abolished at his instigation.[47] His speech on the Plethron (*Or.* 10) again deals with what Libanius perceived as the moral decline of the games. In the beginning of the fourth century, the preliminary contests held in the Plethron were still perfect: "The things which were done in the Plethron had the honor which is given to mysteries: such was the respect which those present felt for each other and for the athletes, such was the stillness and such the hush; and if any contest was worthy of admiration, it was admired in silence."[48] At various stages extra seats were then added to the original two rows, so that more people could watch the matches. The newcomers were not all as honorable and silent as the select group of before – they included schoolboys and the unemployed – and caused the preliminary matches to be loud and disorderly. The rhetor objected, in other words, to the celebration of the Olympics as a spectacle rather than as a solemn ceremony.[49]

Libanius' speeches on the moral decline of the games are often used as arguments for an historical deterioration of the *agon*; they are taken as proof that these became mere spectacles like the Roman games and had lost their sacred character.[50] That the Olympics were appreciated by a lively crowd is certainly true. John Chrysostom says that poles linked by canvas were set up in the stadium to keep the spectators away from the athletes and to limit their mania.[51] This popularity of the Antioch Olympics was no doubt one of the factors why these games survived well into Christian times. The appreciation for athletic contests by an enthusiastic crowd was,

[46] *Or.* 53.18: ἥξει γε Ὀλύμπια γυμνοῦντα μὲν ἀθλητάς, γυμνοῦντα δὲ καὶ νέον δαιτυμόνων οὐκ ὀλίγων.

[47] *Or.* 38.5: τὰ μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνον παρὰ τοῦ τὰ Ὀλύμπια τιθέντος διδόμενα τοῖς δαιτυμόσι φέρειν οἴκαδε βαρεῖάν τε καὶ οὐ φορητὴν ἐποίει τὴν λειτουργίαν καὶ ἦν κίνδυνος μὴ μένειν τὴν ἑορτήν. τοῦτ᾽ ἐγὼ παῦσαι βουλόμενος παρῆνεσα μὲν πολλοῖς, ἔπεισα δὲ ἕνα τῷ συμβούλῳ τὴν συμβουλὴν κρίναντα.

[48] *Or.* 10.6. Translation of Downey 1961: 689.

[49] For a longer discussion of this oration see Chapter 13, pp. 330ff.

[50] Downey 1939: 180; Millon and Schouler 1988: 70. Soler 2006: 87–89 even interprets it as the influence of Dionysism.

[51] John Chrysostom, *Hom. 2 in Genesim* (PG 54) 587: Οἱ γὰρ τοὺς ἀγῶνας ἐκείνους ἐξ ἀρχῆς διαταξάμενοι, σκόλοπας πήξαντες ὀξεῖς, καὶ σχοινία κύκλῳ περιβαλόντες, οὕτω τῶν θεατῶν τὴν μανίαν εἴργουσι. "Those who originally instituted these games stuck sharp poles in the ground and put up canvas around them and so controlled the mania of the public." The *agon* is not specified, but as this sermon was addressed to the Christians of Antioch, one can assume that such a construction existed there.

however, not unique to Antioch, nor was it an evolution of a few decades. It can be seriously doubted whether matches in the combat sports – indisputably the most popular athletic events – were ever really solemn. Already in the classical and Hellenistic period, there had been a public of ardent fans.[52] Libanius' complaints about the lack of solemnness certainly does not prove that the Olympics no longer were a religious feast; spectacles and religious feasts are not mutually exclusive.

When Libanius composed his speech on the Plethron in 384, he was a seventy-year-old teacher of rhetoric. That he idealized the past and perceived moral decline in the present, and liked to complain about it, is not surprising for a man of his profession and age. The period before 332, which he described as ideal, was experienced by him only as a child, when he could not have belonged to the small group of spectators he describes. No doubt the situation was not exactly the same when the accommodation for the spectators of the preliminary matches was more limited, but one should avoid using contemporary moral criticisms to identify decline. Looking beyond the moral overtone, it is striking that at a time when several cities had difficulty financing *agones*, an aging intellectual in Antioch was bemoaning the popularity of the preliminary matches there.

For the history of the Antiochene Olympics in the late fourth and fifth centuries, sources are more scarce, and they document change as well as continuity. In the later fourth century, the alytarch still retained a privilege that may have had a ritual aspect: his function entitled him, according to a law from 379, to cut one cypress in the sacred grove of Apollo in Daphne, provided he planted several new ones.[53] That this privilege was granted to a president of games for Zeus may reflect the decline of the cult of Apollo, whose temple was damaged by a fire in 362.[54] The privilege was withdrawn by another law of 427–429[55], perhaps in connection to the closure of the Zeus temple and appropriation of the grove by the state.

At the beginning of the fifth century, the games were certainly still popular. According to Palladius, Porphyrios in 404 waited to have himself secretely ordained bishop until everyone had left the city to go to the Olympic games at Daphne, so that the flocks of women normally to be found in the church would have gone away with the crowd.[56] This does not imply that these Christian women also watched the matches. We know

[52] Polybius 27.9 offers a nice anecdote on spectator behavior in the late third century BC.
[53] *Cod. Theod.* 10.1.12.
[54] Julian, *Ep.* (no. Budé) 98.400a–b; Libanius, *Or.* 60. Cf. Soler 2006: 16–21.
[55] *Cod. Iust.* 11.78.2. For the date see PLRE II: 412 (Fl. Eudoxius 5).
[56] Palladius, *Dialogus de vita Joannis Chrysostomi* (SC 341) 16.102.

from Libanius that women were normally not permitted in the stadium, but this does not exclude them from the festivities in general.[57] Palladius' story suggests, however, that the festive atmosphere of the Olympics was even attractive to women who would have identified themselves as Christians.

Daphne continued to be the focus of the games also in later years. A fifth- or sixth-century structure in the city of Antioch near Bath C has been called 'Byzantine stadium' by the excavators, but this is not an appropriate term: it is too large to be a stadium (circa 72 m wide and more than 350 m long) and it was surrounded simply by a wall, not by any kind of seating. Humphrey has termed it a hippodrome-garden and interpreted it as a private exercise track surrounded by trees.[58] Therefore it is unlikely that this structure was linked to the Olympics. The topographical border of the so-called Megalopsychia Hunt mosaic from about 460 shows that the old Olympic stadium (τὸ Ὀλυμπιακόν) on the road to Daphne was still in use.[59]

In the course of the fifth century, the games must have experienced some challenges, for it became ever more difficult to find *curiales* to become alytarch. Instead, the city turned to powerful imperial officials. In 448, the funds were provided by Antiochos Chouzon, a native of Antioch and that year's *praefectus praetorio Orientis*.[60] A law from 465 stipulated that the "alytarchy of Syria" was henceforth one of the responsibilities of the *comes orientis*.[61]

The notoriously unreliable chronicle of John Malalas is the most important sixth-century source for the Antiochene Olympics. It is not always clear which century it documents, however. The passage with a description of the ceremonial garb of the main officials (12.7–9) is explicitly attributed to the fourth- or fifth-century chronicle of Domninus. The dating according to the Antiochene era suggests that this passage at least ultimately goes back, via Domninus, to the city archives, which indicates reliability. That information on the cloths of officials could be found in city

[57] Libanius, *Or.* 10.30. He adds that on one occasion an impious man did allow women in for a couple of days. Soler 2006: 38, who takes this man as a Christian in some official function, places this anecdote before 362, when the body of the martyr was moved. The date must remain hypothetical, however, as anyone going against the traditions of the Olympics might seem impious to Libanius. If the temporary permission was issued by a progressive alytarch, there is no reason to link this anecdote to either the remains of Babylas or his shrine, which remained in Daphne after 362.

[58] Elderkin 1934: 32–33; Humphrey 1986: 458.

[59] Lassus 1969; Kondoleon 2000: 115, 148 (photograph).

[60] Malalas 14.17 (ed. Thurn 2000). For the year when he was *praefectus* see PLRE II: 104.

[61] *Cod. Iust.* 1.36.1.

archives should not be a surprise. A long inscription from Oenoanda shows that this type of information was indeed written down in civic decrees upon foundation of a contest.[62]

Malalas' subsequent description of the participants and the games (12.10) is, on the other hand, a mixture of fact and fiction. He mentions competitions in wrestling, running, trumpet-playing, *pankration*, boxing, chariot racing, singing songs from tragedies, and reciting hymns, all common events at *agones*. The victors were ἀσυντελής and ἀλειτούργητος, that is exempted from taxes and liturgies. These terms are also found on imperial-age documents regarding privileges for athletes[63] and seem to come from a reliable source, perhaps again via Domninus, but the further explanation of Malalas does not: when he applies the exemption of liturgies specifically to the owners of workshops, which is without parallel in other texts, he gives a personal interpretation. The general picture he draws of the participants was certainly not derived from imperial-age documents. In passages for which Malalas had no good sources, his sixth-century perspective shines through. He introduces his description of the participants as follows: "Young people of noble birth from every city and country district would come to the sacred contest of the Olympic festival to compete under a vow and they matched themselves against each other. They conducted themselves chastely and with great moderation, and received no gain from any source. For they were rich and had their own slaves as attendants, each according to his wealth."[64] Though participants were at least relatively well-to-do during the whole history of the *agones*, this fact is rarely so explicitly mentioned in older sources. In the sixth century, however, contests in which the leisured class competed were no longer common and Malalas had to make sure that his readers did not think of lower-class performers. We can wonder what convinced upper-class young men to compete in an *agon* a century after this had ceased to be a normal pastime for them. Malalas admits that sometimes only a few came, depending on the weather. Probably, the young notables' reasons for participating were similar to the reasons for the imitation of classical literature: because it seemed to belong to traditional high culture. As was observed for the 'third sophistic' under the Komnenoi, the re-creation or performance of a classical past by the cultivated upper class was in the first place a literary pursuit, but could occasionally also be expressed in a more practical manner.[65]

[62] Wörrle 1988: 10, ll. 52–53, 56–57, 61–62. [63] Pap.Agon. 3, l. 5; 10, ll. 15–16.
[64] Translation from Jeffreys, Jeffreys and Scott 1986: 153. [65] Cf. pp. 67ff.

In the passage on the participants, the Christian chronicler repeats time and again that they were characterized by self-control or, in a Christian sense, chaste behavior (σωφροσύνη). Self-control was a traditional part of the lifestyle of a professional athlete, but this can hardly account for Malalas' unusual focus on this quality. Again this can be explained by the late-antique perspective of the author: the nude physical contact of athletes was not compatible with the Christian ideal of chastity, so to present the Olympics in a positive light, Malalas had to assert the correct behavior of the participants. The author repeatedly mentioned that they competed κατὰ τάγμα, according to a rule or under a vow, only once explaining what this rule was about: κατὰ τάγμα σωφροσύνης. Though unheard of elsewhere, the addition of such a rule of chaste behavior indeed seems a likely compromise between those citizens of Antioch who wanted to keep the contest and those Christians who objected to it on moral grounds. It may imply that the athletes wore at least loincloths. Malalas' addition that victors would remain chaste for the rest of their lives, because they were ordained priests immediately after the contest, sounds like pure fiction.

Another remarkable element in Malalas' description is the mention of contests for girls: virgins practiced philosophy and competed among each other in running, wrestling (in leggings[66]), singing songs from tragedies, and reciting hymns. That girls competed is certainly possible. Contests for the daughters of notables were attached to several important games in the imperial age. An inscription for the winner of the female competition in Naples explicitly states from what social layers they were recruited: Seia Spes won the *stadion* "for daughters of councilors." Inscriptions for girl victors are rare, though. Seia Spes got one because she was the daughter of the *agonothetes*. An exceptional inscription, set up in Delphi and dedicated to Apollo, records the victories of three sisters from Tralles, who traveled with their father around Greece to participate in the *Pythia, Isthmia*, and *Nemea*, as well as in Sikyon, Athens, and Epidaurus. That does not mean that there was a circuit of professionally competing girls. The middle sister won in three completely different events: horse racing, *stadion* running, and singing with *kithara*. This is unimaginable in the professional circuit for men. The inscription and travels were paid for by an indulgent father,

[66] Malalas 12.10 (ed. Thurn 2000): (l. 97) μετὰ βομβωναρίων. Βομβωνάρια are only attested twice. Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Topographia christiana* (SC 141) 5.47 speaks of περισκελῆ (a piece of clothing around the legs or thighs), τουτέστι βομβωνάρια λινᾶ. The translation 'leggings' comes from Jeffreys, Jeffreys, and Scott 1986: 153.

who probably projected on his daughters ambitions for the sons he never had.[67]

Against this background, the notion that Antioch had games for girls is credible. None of the other sources for the Olympics mentions girls, however. In fact, they rather hint at the opposite.[68] Since Malalas tends to identify any contest with the Olympics,[69] it is possible that the contest for girls was not a part of the Olympics, but a separate contest, in the same way as the *Heraia* in Olympia were not part of the Olympic games. Although the chronicler often glues information from various sources together in a fantastic interpretative frame, usually there is some historical fact underlying his fictitious interpretation. The silence of other sources on such a girls' contest is in this case not surprising. Games for girls had no prestige, but were merely an occasion for local rich girls to show off their accomplishments – whether these lay in the shape of their bodies, the sound of their voices, or the quality of their poetry.

Even if there was indeed at some point a contest for girls in Antioch, however, one cannot deduce from Malalas' description that girls still competed in the fourth, fifth, or sixth centuries. The only other late-antique indication of contests for girls is the famous fourth-century mosaic of the bikini-girls – wearing tiny shorts rather than leggings – from Piazza Armerina, but also in this case the historical reality behind the source remains unclear. Malalas' passage on the girls is attached to the story of the introduction of the Olympics in year 260 of the Antiochene era, that is 212. With all its stress on chastity this description is not what we expect of a third-century contest, but it does not fit a late-antique Christian context either, as the girl victors supposedly became priestesses (ἱέρειαι). Again, this is most plausibly a mixture of various elements. Malalas wanted to place information he found elsewhere – presumably in the lost chronicle of Domninus – in the right pagan context, but his fanciful interpretation could not hide his own Christian mindset.

The only time when Malalas certainly writes on the sixth-century Olympics is when he says that the last celebration was that of 520 (17.13). The chronicler, a citizen of Antioch, was about thirty at the time and could

[67] SEG XIV 602 (Naples); IAG 63 (Delphi). The evidence for girls practicing athletics in the Greek world has been collected in Arrigoni 1985.

[68] Libanius says nothing about female participation, but *Or.* 10.30 mentions that women were normally not allowed in the Olympic stadium and *Or.* 53.19 that they were not allowed at the banquet. John Chrysostom, *In sanctum Ignatium martyrem* (PG 50) 587 states that while in the athletic contests only men compete, the *agon* of the soul is for women too.

[69] Remijsen 2010a: 429–36.

therefore speak from his own experience. Interestingly, there is another historical witness for the last-but-one edition in 516. Bishop Severus of Antioch (512–518) tried to convince his flock not to attend these games at the ends of three of his homilies. These were originally composed in Greek, but survive in a Syriac translation. He described the matches in detail: how the competitors rubbed their skin first with oil and then covered it with dust, how they competed for a crown and to be proclaimed by the herald, and how they had to abide by a set of sporting rules, for example staying within a limited wrestling area.[70] He mentioned the *pentathlon* too, but in a metaphor which suggests that Severus did not know what exactly it entailed.[71] His description of the festivities highlighted their pagan nature: Christians went up to Daphne in a pagan manner: clean shaven, wearing a short tunic and a stick in a procession for Zeus. At night they lit torches and burned incense in the stadium. The patriarch objected to the Olympics on religious and moral grounds. His moral argumentation was similar to that of Libanius in his oration on the Olympic banquet (*Or.* 53): Severus found the competitions bestial and senseless, and the festivities licentious.[72] He refers to Zeus and Ganymede, the absence of women, and the danger of homosexual contacts. To avoid any suspicion about his own faith, Severus added that he got his information from shocked and weeping witnesses.[73] It was not Christians like Severus who effected the end four years later, however, but a general prohibition of games of all types by Justin I, in reaction to rioting by the Blues in 524.[74]

Athletics in the rest of Syria

No doubt exaggerating as befitted the rhetorical genre, Libanius presents the Antiochene Olympics as the most glorious games of his time, in which even the Eleans were interested.[75] Other authors no doubt claimed the same thing for the games in their own cities, but as it happens, only the work of Libanius is preserved. Despite the elevated praise Libanius never suggests that the Olympics were at all unique in Syria. In a letter from 361 (*Ep.* 663), he praises Sopater for his lavish expenditure on the Olympic

[70] *Hom.* 94 (PO 25), 71–74.
[71] *Hom.* 91 (PO 25), 25. Saint Athanasius did not just practice "the *pentathlon*, that is the set of five contests," but obtained myriads of victories.
[72] *Hom.* 91 (PO 25), 25–26.
[73] *Hom.* 95 (PO 25), 93–94. For another translation see Graffin 1978: 127.
[74] Malalas 17.12. For a discussion of the end of the Antiochene Olympics see pp. 217ff.
[75] Libanius, *Or.* 53.2.

games of Apamea, resulting in a high number of contestants and many prizes. In both this letter and another one of the same year (*Ep*. 668) he also mentions that Olympius, a leading notable from Antioch, went to Apamea especially for these games. Furthermore, Libanius alludes to the Pythian games of Syrian Laodicea in a letter from 363 (*Ep*. 1392),[76] and in 364 (*Ep*. 1243) he refers to an ex-student of his colleague, the rhetorician Quirinus, who had twice given a speech at Pythian games. This contest could have been held anywhere – it is not known who this student was, nor where Quirinus taught him[77] – but Syrian Laodicea, the nearest city with Pythian games, would be a good guess, since Libanius knew about the orations and elsewhere characterizes the inhabitants of Laodicea as φιλόλογοι.[78] Clearly, the Antiochene Olympics were no exception: smaller Syrian cities too still organized games in the third quarter of the fourth century. It is remarkable that these contests were all held in a different year. This suggests that there were still multiple local circuits. As explained for the third century, the most important games of Syria, such as the Antiochene Olympics, took place in the fourth year of the Olympiad, for example in 364, but the minor contests formed local circuits in other years. For a town organizing a contest outside such a circuit it was more difficult, and hence more expensive, to attract athletes. Such contests were, in other words, more likely to disappear in times of crisis. That Apamea and Laodicea were still organizing contests in 361 and 363 respectively therefore suggests that at least two minor Syrian circuits had at least partially survived until the 360s.

For Seleukeia Pieria, another town close to Antioch, there is no direct evidence for games, but a mosaic similarly attests a continued interest in athletics. In the so-called house of the porticoes, which has an earlier agonistic mosaic in the 'portico of the *pentathlon*', a second mosaic can probably be dated to an early fourth-century renovation on the basis of stylistic criteria such as shadows under the eyes and the portrayal of busts in elaborate frames. Complete figurative agonistic scenes alternate with athletic busts in medallions. Only one figurative scene is sufficiently preserved to interpret; it shows a victorious athlete besides a herm. One of the athletes in the medallions is named: ΝΕΙΚΟΣΤΡΑΤΟΣ ΑΙΓΑΙΟΣ (Fig. 2).

Nikostratos of Aigeai was a historical athlete – his career was almost 300 years in the past when the mosaic was laid out – but the continued pride in a great champion from the region, the last athlete to succeed in winning the

[76] For the identification of the contest and city see Feissel 2010: 80–86.
[77] For Quirinus see PLRE I: 760–61.
[78] *Ep*. 1353.1. See Feissel 2010: 87–88 for the identification of this city as Laodicea.

Figure 2 Mosaic bust of Nikostratos of Aegeai, from the House of the Porticoes at Seleukeia Pieria (early fourth century).

Olympic wrestling and *pankration* in one day, is not in contradiction with an interest in contemporary games.[79]

Libanius mentions one contest far out of the Syrian metropolitan area: in his autobiography he tells that Julian organized an *agon* with an athletic and equestrian competition for his army near Ctesiphon. It is not clear how grand we must imagine these games to have been. Most sources on this period of rest in the war mention only horse races – and Ammianus Marcellinus, a member of the expedition, does not mention games at all – but fragments of Eunapius do refer to athletics as well.[80] In all likelihood the competition should be imagined as matches between some more athletic soldiers, not as a full *agon* with professional competitors.

By the fifth century, the Antiochene Olympics seem to have become exceptional. A law from 465 that made the liturgy (*munus*) of alytarch in

[79] Bohne 2011: K85b.

[80] Libanius, *Or.* 1.133. Other sources: Libanius, *Or.* 18.249; Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.1.6; *Suidas* E 322; Festus 28 (using the vague term *ludi campestres*); Ammianus Marcellinus 24.6–7; Eunapius *Fr.* 27.3–4.

Syria Prima the responsibility of the *comes orientis* implies that there was only one alytarch – and therefore only one Olympic contest – left in *Syria Prima* and probably in the whole diocese of the East.[81] *Agonothetai* of other contests are not mentioned: they may no longer have existed, and even if they did, they were not given structural support.

Yet some early Byzantine inscriptions seem to suggest that Greek athletics had not disappeared completely in the rest of Syria. In Gaza, a boy of sixteen was praised for "winning contests in the stadia where prizes were to be won" (τελέων σταδίοισιν ἀεθλοφόροισιν ἀγῶνας) in a funeral inscription in hexameters from 569.[82] Gaza was in the fifth and sixth century mostly Christian, but in its famous school of rhetoric young men were still taught their classics. The hexameters indicate that the boy came from this hellenophile circle. Members of the school such as Choricius or Aeneas, though Christians, knew classical culture well and often used agonistic metaphors.[83] Probably, the contests of the inscription were a mere metaphor for his Christian way of life. It is not wholly implausible, however, that a group of boys going to a school for Greek culture would compete in some type of athletic school contests. The long history of the Antiochene Olympics in fact make sense only if athletics was still attractive in at least some elite circles.

Another possible indication for the continuity of contests among late-antique notables is an inscription, probably from the fifth century, on a granite column in the circus of Tyre reading † Νέπωτος παραδό(ξου).[84] This column indicated the reserved seat of a man called Nepos. That he had a personal inscription suggests he was a man of some importance. If the abbreviation was supplemented correctly as *paradoxos* by the editors, he carried a title exclusively known from agonistic inscriptions. It is not clear which type or combination of victories this particular title represented, perhaps just two victories in the same contest. The inscription would be the

[81] *Cod. Iust.* 1.36.1.

[82] SEG XXXVII 1485. Drawing of the inscription in Steinepigramme IV 21/05/02. The late date of this inscription is certain: it is dated according to the calendar of Gaza, to the year 629 of the local era, which can be calculated to have started in 61–60 BC, on the basis of second- and third-century numismatic evidence, the *Chronicon Paschale* and the *Vita Porpyrii*, and the indictions mentioned in early Christian inscriptions such as this one, by Clermont-Ganneau 1896: 419–29.

[83] For Hellenism and Christianity in late-antique Gaza see Downey 1963, Van Dam 1985, Saliou 2005, and Penella 2009. Choricius' *Apologia* is occasionally cited as evidence for athletics in the sixth century (e.g. Gutsfeld 2013: 159) but this rhetorical showpiece is full of classical references and thus not immediately useful as evidence for the contemporary reality. Only 32.106-107, where he discusses a recent law prohibiting teachers to attend the theater, clearly refers to contemporary circumstances. Here athletics is conspicuously absent.

[84] SEG LII 1610. Cf. Rey-Coquais 2002: 332.

only attestation of the title after the mid fourth century, however. Given the longevity of the Antiochene Olympics, it is theoretically possible that Nepos had indeed won an *agon*, but without a late-antique parallel the supplement is not really convincing. Forms of παραδίδωμι, transmitting or passing on (the seat?), should be considered as well.

Athletics in Cilicia and Isauria

Diocletian split the Cilician region into two provinces, Cilicia in the west and Isauria in the east. For both provinces the information on late-antique athletics is extremely poor after the cessation of agonistic inscriptions and civic coins. In Aigeai, a mosaic depicting an umpire, a herm, and three wrestlers, one of them with his hair in a *cirrus*, may date from the early or even mid fourth century, because of stylistic resemblances to mosaics in a villa at Daphne dated to the 340s.[85]

Basil of Seleucia in Isauria wrote a sermon against the Olympic games in the first half of the fifth century. Unlike his other sermons, this one was not inspired by a biblical quotation, but by daily life: the season had again brought the Olympic games. In this sermon, Basil elaborates the contrast between the pleasure and the disasters derived from participating in this feast, stressing that in appearance the feast is lovely and innocent, but in essence it is sacrilegious.[86] He no doubt discussed a historical contest – the games were not a metaphor – but this speech contains no evidence for a contest in Seleucia. The sermon is extremely vague; it consists mostly of general phrases on Christian life, with no connection to games, and it contains not a single practical detail. There is no indication that Basil actually knew the particularities of the feast. Considering Seleucia was at easy traveling distance from Antioch, where Olympic games are attested with certainty in this period, and since Basil's work was heavily influenced by that of John Chrysostom, who is known to have been interested in these games, it is more likely that Basil was talking of the Antiochene Olympics, which were visited by some of his flock, than about games in Isauria.

Athletics and the circus

Although in comparison to other regions athletics is well documented in late-antique texts from Syria, the same sources also show that *agones* were certainly not the most important games at the time. References to horse

[85] Bohne 2011: K86. [86] Basil of Seleucia, *Hom.* 27: Εἰς τὰ Ὀλύμπια (PG 85) 308–316, esp. 309.

races, *venationes*, or shows at the theater are more common than mentions of contemporary *agones* (i.e. excluding athletic metaphors). This reflects ancient reality: the gradually disappearing Greek *agones* were held once every four years, while Roman-style games entertained the people on a more regular basis. It was these more frequent temptations for late-antique souls that aroused the anger of Christian moralists like John Chrysostom or Severus of Antioch, and from which pagan moralists such as Libanius or Julian distanced themselves.[87] Of the other entertainments, the circus is most relevant to our subject because of a connection to athletics.

Monumental circuses were constructed in Syria both earlier and more frequently than in the rest of the East. Antioch and Caesarea seem to have had a monumentalized structure suitable for horse races by the end of the first century BC.[88] Unlike for example Greece or Asia Minor, Syria (and Cilicia as well) did not have many *agones*, nor stadia, before the second century. When the Syrian cities did receive games, for example Laodicea in the reign of Septimius Severus, the sports infrastructure constructed with imperial funds was often a circus rather than a stadium.[89] The multifunctionality and impressiveness of the circus explains this preference of the imperial sponsors. Though the presence of a circus obviously created the potential for more regular horse races, there is barely any evidence for horse races independent of *agones*, certainly not outside Antioch. Apparently they gained popularity only in the early fourth century.[90] This increased interest is connected to the imperial presence at that time: more races were held when the emperor was there to watch them.[91] Competing with horses was now no longer a choice for the Syrian notables, as it used to be in the Greek *agones*, but members of the *curia* were appointed as liturgists (ἱπποτρόφοι). A nice

[87] See for example Graffin 1978 for Severus' sermons against spectacles, especially horse racing, and for the relatively small place of the Olympics in his work. Julian, *Misopogon* 4–5 (*Or.* 12 in Budé) claims that he kept away from theaters and detested the hippodrome. For Libanius' conversion from spectacle-loving youth to sincere student at the age of fifteen, see *Or.* 1.5. On the other hand, Libanius wrote a defense of dancers (*Or.* 64) and in the sixth century Choricius of Gaza, a Christian but not a cleric, did the same for mimes (*Op.* 32), these traditional rhetorical exercises were meant to impress the reader with the ability of the rhetor to argue well in favor for a difficult standpoint. Libanius explicitly enters into discussion with his Aelius Aristides.

[88] Humphrey 1986: 444–61; 1996: 121–24.

[89] Between the second and early fourth centuries, circuses were built in Tyre, Caesarea (besides the smaller existing structure), Beirut, Laodicea, Bostra and Gerasa, Anazarbus, and Aigeai. See Humphrey 1986: 461–504, 527, 535–39.

[90] See Cameron 1976: 204–19 for horse racing in the East from the early Empire until the late fourth century. IGLS III.1 965, a funerary stele mentioning a testamentary donation of κιρκήσια in Daphne, is unfortunately not dated.

[91] Diocletian, Galerius, Maximinus Daia, and Constantius II resided in Antioch for prolonged periods, see Barnes 1982: 49–87.

illustration of the involuntary character of paying for the horses is an anecdote of a frightened Christian liturgist from Gaza who received the support of the monk Hilarion.[92] Because the *hippotrophia* was a heavy liturgy, especially in large cities, the liturgists would in some cases receive imperial support. Julian, for example, earmarked 3,000 lots of tax-free land for those who procured the horse races in Antioch.[93]

An unknown author from the Syro-Palestinian area described in his *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* the entertainment sector of Syria about 360. Most shows, both the circus and other kinds of entertainment, were to be found in Antioch, since the emperor resided there, but "likewise Laodicea, Tyre, Beirut, and Caesarea have a circus, and Laodicea sends, moreover, excellent charioteers to other cities, Tyre and Beirut send out mimes, Caesarea pantomimes, and Heliopolis chorus-singers, as the Muses of Libanon inspire them with a divine voice. Furthermore Gaza has good *auditores* and it is said that they also have *pammacharii*. Ascalon has athlete-wrestlers and Castabala acrobats."[94] Athletes, namely wrestlers and *pammacharii*,[95] are listed in the same manner as charioteers, mimes, pantomimes, or acrobats, all lower-class entertainers. This may suggest that these were not athletes traveling around the Mediterranean from one *agon* to the other, but men who performed in the circus, as an interlude. A group of *pammacharii* that traveled from Tyre to Constantinople, two cities with a circus, was a similar group of circus performers.[96]

[92] Jerome, *Vita sancti Hilarionis* 11. [93] Julian, *Misopogon* 43 (no. Budé).

[94] *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* (SC 124) 32: *Habes ergo Antiochiam quidem in omnibus delectabilibus abundantem, maxime autem circensibus. Omnia autem quare? Quoniam ibi imperator sedet, necesse est omnia propter eum. Ecce similiter Laodicia circenses et Tyrus et Berytus et Caesarea; sed Laodicia mittit aliis civitatibus agitatores optimos, Tyrus et Berytus mimarios, Caesarea pantomimos, Heliopolis choraulas, maxime quod a Libano Musae illis inspirent divinitatem dicendi. Aliquando autem et Gaza habet bonos auditores; dicitur autem habere eam et pammacharios, Ascalon athletas luctatores, Castabala calopectas.* The meaning of *auditores* is unclear.

[95] For this sport see Remijsen 2010b: 200–04. [96] *Apophthegmata* 39 (ed. Nau 1907).

CHAPTER 4

Egypt

The agonistic tradition

Greek culture was introduced on the African continent with the foundation of Cyrene in 631 BC. In the fifth and fourth centuries, competitors from Cyrene, and one from nearby Barca, obtained at least eleven victories at the Olympics and more at other contests in Greece. Some of these competitors were athletes, but most victories were obtained in the horse races. Presumably cities in Cyrenaica had their own games as well, with a purely local catchment area.[1] After the fourth century, the region was less successful; we know of only three international victories from the Hellenistic period onward.[2]

After the conquests of Alexander the Great, however, Egypt joined the agonistic circuit too.[3] Competitors from Egypt, athletes as well as court members competing in the horse races, were particularly successful in the third century, because of the interest and support of the first Ptolemaic kings. Permanent Greek games were founded in the Egyptian *poleis*: we know of several contests in Alexandria, among them the *Ptolemaia, Theadelpheia*, and *Basileia*, and of a musical contest in Ptolemais.[4] Most of the towns where Greek immigrants settled were not *poleis*, though, and they did not have public *agones*.[5] Gymnasia on the other hand existed in provincial towns and even villages. Athletics was practiced here and local competitions for young men connected to the military, the so-called

[1] This is at least what Pindar, *Pyth*. 9.102–103 suggests.

[2] Moretti 1957: nos. 194, 257, 268, 269, 347, 421, 423, 428, 430, 442, 508, 537, 648, and 889. 960 as well, but the date is very uncertain. For victories elsewhere see Luni 1976: esp. 233–34.

[3] Decker 2012 collects fifty-eight source texts (in German translation) on sport in Egypt, from the Pharaonic to the Roman period and illustrates this shift from local to Greek sporting traditions.

[4] Remijsen 2013: 352–55.

[5] It is a common idea that *agones* did exist in the *chora* (e.g. Van Rengen 1971: 136–39; Fraser 1972: I.232, II.381; Koenen 1977: 1; Perpillou-Thomas 1993: 152–53), but this is not proven. Cf. Remijsen 2013: 351, 354–55.

neaniskoi, are equally attested.[6] Because the towns in the *chora* were not *poleis*, membership of a gymnasium could not imply citizenship as in Asia Minor, but it did indicate that one belonged to the Greek (or Hellenized) elite. The members of this elite continued for many generations to identify themselves as Greeks by mentioning the city their family originated from as their 'nationality'. Presumably also linked to the particular Egyptian situation is the absence of a formally organized ephebate outside of Alexandria before the late second century BC.[7] Only in the cities of Cyrenaica, which were actual *poleis*, did the ephebate also exist from the third century on. We can also assume the existence of games here, certainly in Apollonia, where a stadium was built in the second century (see Map 4).[8]

In the early imperial age, *agones* were still limited to the *poleis*. In the first century AD, there were games only in Alexandria: an old quadrennial *agon*, perhaps named *Seleukeios agon* after the homonymous Alexandrian deme, biennial imperial games, and annual games for ephebes.[9] In the reign of Hadrian, a contest called *Hadrianeia* was added, which was renamed *agon Hadrianeios Philadelpheios* under Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. *Olympia* were probably added in 175/176.[10] The newest Egyptian *polis*, Antinoopolis, received sacred games upon its foundation in AD 130, the *Megala Antinoeia*. These were held each year, which is uncommon for sacred games, but typical of ephebic games. '*Megala*' in the name of a contest normally means that extra competitions were added to the standard festival (cf. the difference between the small and the great *Panathenaia* in Athens).[11] In this case the ephebic *Antinoeia* seem to have become *Megala*

[6] BGU VI 1256, SB XX 14728.

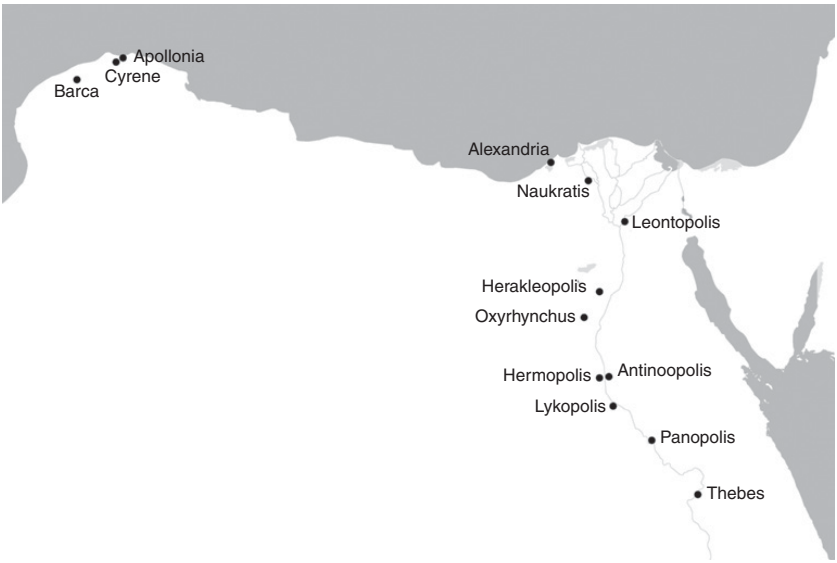
[7] Kennell 2006 lists all attestations of ephebes and ephebic officers by location. The earliest source for the *chora* is SB III 6159 (Theadelphia), dated by him to 157/6 BC. Because the inscription only gives the regnal year (25), not the name of the king, it could equally be of 145 or 90/89. See also Habermann 2007: 341 and Legras 1999: 133–42.

[8] For the ephebate see Luni 1976: esp. 269–71. For Apollonia see Davesne 1978–1979: 252–53.

[9] IAG 65 (circa. AD 60), 67 (circa 90), and 68 (circa 110) mention 'the quadrennial contest' of Alexandria. Of the games known from later inscriptions using the proper name of contests, only the Σελεύκειος ἀγών (IAG 84, 212–217) could already have existed in the first century. The name suggests that it dates back to the Hellenistic period. For the connection with the deme Seleukeios see Clarysse and Swinnen 1983: 13–14. IAG 84 also mentions a Σεβαστεῖος ἀγών. This *agon* might be identified with the biennial τριετηρικὸ[ς] ἀγῶ[ν ca. 19] ἐπὶ τιμῆ θεῶν Λιβίας κα[ὶ] announced in P.Oxy. XVII 2105. This papyrus dates from 232/7, but an imperial contest in honor of Livia must date back to the first century. SB VIII 10068 also mentions a biennial contest, held for the fifty-first time at some point in the second or third century, which may or may not be the same *agon*. P.Lond. VI 1912, the letter from Claudius to the Alexandrians, mentions games for ephebes (ll. 92–95).

[10] Strasser 2004–2005: 443. For the *Hadrianeios Philadelpheios agon* see also IAG 84 (212–217).

[11] For a hieroglyphic inscription see Decker 1973. For the meaning of '*megala*' see Slater 2007: 32.



Map 4 Map of Egypt.

by the addition of competitions for boys and adult men.[12] The ephebic competition of Antinoopolis was a trendsetter: two later ephebic contests in Egypt were modeled after it and hence called ἰσαντινόειος.[13]

In the *chora*, membership of the gymnasium no longer simply represented an elite lifestyle, but became by the imperial period an official criterion for belonging to the privileged gymnasial class. Admission was regulated strictly in the first century AD: only boys whose fathers and maternal grandfathers had been members were allowed.[14] Through the ephebate, a number of boys became acquainted with Greek athletics.[15] The most talented traveled abroad to compete at prestigious international games, including the Olympics.[16] Though *agones* were still not held in

[12] For a list of ephebes from Antinoopolis (with the victors first) see Rigsby 1978. PSI III 199 lists participants in the age-category of the boys for the seventy-third celebration in 203. For the adult men see P.Lond. III 1164 i.

[13] SEG XL 1568 and SB X 10493.

[14] Under Augustus, aspiring ephebes had to be sons of a man from the gymnasial class and a free woman, but from the third quarter of the first century, they also had to prove that their maternal grandfather belonged to the gymnasial class. See van Minnen 2002: 344–47.

[15] For the ephebes and other age groups in Roman Egypt see Legras 1999: esp. 184–94.

[16] Pausanias 5.21.15–16. The *olympionikes* of SB XX 14085 (AD 32 – Arsinoite nome) must have won at Olympia as well, as this is too early for local Olympics.

the *chora*, the local competitors could profit from the worldwide upsurge of athletics in the second century. Several Egyptians became *hieronikai*,[17] for example M. Aurelius Demetrios from Hermopolis, who in the 150s or 160s was victorious in international games as a boy and adult athlete, became *periodonikes* and, after his career, high priest of the international athletic association. His son M. Aurelius Asklepiades was even more successful. As Hermopolis did not yet have *polis* status, father and son competed as Alexandrians.[18] The number of Alexandrians in victory lists is therefore very high: in the fifty-five Olympiads from AD 1 to 217 (i.e. the end of Eusebius' Olympic victor list), 17 Alexandrian athletes won no less than 19 of all *stadion* races, that is 35 percent. No other Greek city comes even close to this result, because the number of Alexandrians in fact represents all champions from Egypt. This is confirmed by the fact that up to circa 200, agonistic inscriptions too attest only Alexandrian victors.[19] Not all Egyptians had the talent or resources to compete internationally, however. Inside Egypt, possibilities were scarce, though some athletes could earn a bit of money by competing in demonstration matches at non-agonistic local festivities. A *pankration* or boxing contest was a popular side event at such feasts, besides performances of poets or musicians.[20]

The real heyday of Greek athletics in Egypt started with the Severi. After the grant of city councils to the Egyptian *metropoleis* about 200,[21] they became real *poleis* and could decide to introduce an *agon*. The institutional change created, in other words, the possibility of a local agonistic circuit in Egypt. Hermopolis received local *Kapitolia* already under Septimius Severus or his son Caracalla.[22] The athletic tradition of the neighboring

[17] E.g. BGU I 119 (175), P.Berl.Leihg. I 4 (165), II 35 (141), P.Lond. III 1179 (146–147?), P.Oxy. XLIV 3197 (111), P.Ross.Georg. II 18 (140), P.Tebt. II 286 (131).

[18] Inscriptions normally mention their Alexandrian citizenship before describing them as inhabitants of Hermopolis and sometimes mention only Alexandria. Cf. IGUR I 239 = IG XIV 1104, IGUR I 240 = IG XIV 1102, IGUR I 241 = IG XIV 1103, P.Lond. III 1178, I.Porto 16, OGIS 714 = IGR I 154. The exception is IGUR I 239, in which Hermopolis is mentioned first for Demetrios, though second for Asklepiades. For Asklepiades see Drew-Bear 1991 and Strasser 2004–2005: 439–46.

[19] Robert 1980: 430, n. 19–25.

[20] Accounts such as P.Oxy. III 519 (with sums for artists, people to walk in the procession, some athletes, etc.) reflect the costs of demonstration matches and performances at local festivities. SB V 8250 records a payment for "all sorts of jobs" concerning fighting matches at Arsinoe (ἀγῶνος πα(νκρατιαστῶν) καὶ πυ(κτῶν(?)). That only two types of athletes fought indicates that these were demonstration matches as well.

[21] For the *boule* in Egypt see Bowman 1971. On the importance of its introduction for athletics, see Frisch 1986: 12, Van Rengen 1997: 290, and Remijsen 2013: 358–59.

[22] IK Side 130: a herald competing here in the reign of Septimius Severus or Caracalla. SB XXVIII 16959 attests the survival of the contest in the reign of Gallienus. P.Ryl. II 117 likewise mentions an ex-*agonothetes* of Hermopolis in 269. P.Ryl. II 86, a notification of payment by the treasurer πολιτικῶν καὶ ἱερατικῶν χρημάτων for horse races in 195, illustrates the local agonistic enthusiasm

city Antinoopolis and the influence at the imperial court of the Hermopolitan citizen M. Aurelius Asklepiades, president of the international athletic association, may explain why Hermopolis was the first new *polis* to have a sacred *agon*. Likewise in the early third century, annual sacred games for ephebes, modeled after the games at Antinoopolis, were established in Oxyrhynchus and Leontopolis, and possibly also elsewhere.[23] There may have been games in the Arsinoite nome as well.[24] Cities with games got their own xystarchs representing the athletic association. All dated instances of xystarchs are later than Septimius Severus, and most postdate 250.[25]

A second wave of new institutions followed under Gallienus and Aurelian. The Alexandrian *Olympia* and the *Antinoeia* in Antinoopolis were upgraded to eiselastic status, Panopolis got *Paneia*, Antinoopolis and Oxyrhynchus *Kapitolia*.[26] Lykopolis had games as well by this date, though their name is not known.[27] The major games (the Alexandrian *Olympia*, the *Kapitolia* of Antinoopolis, the *Paneia*, and the games at Hermopolis) took place in the winter between the third and fourth year of the Olympiad and in this way attached themselves to the circuit of the main Syrian games in the fourth year.[28] Most Egyptian contests are not attested in agonistic inscriptions, however, as their catchment area was regional; they attracted

of this city shortly before the grant of *polis* status. These races were organized by gymnasium officials, the *kosmetai*.

[23] P.Oxy. IV 705 (200–202) is an imperial letter securing a private donation of money for permanent ephebic games. The first edition took place in 210 (SB X 10493 attests the eighteenth edition in 227). See Rigsby 1977. The games became sacred between 217 (P.Oxy. IX 1202) and 227 (SB X 10493), probably under Elagabalus, when Leontopolis also received sacred ephebic games. The first edition of the Leontopolis games in 220 is attested in a monumental list of ephebes (SEG XL 1568). Cf. Tod 1951 and the remarks by Robert in *REG* 65 (1952): 190–96.

[24] This is suggested by the appointment of men for the ἀγωνοφυλ(ακία) in P. Ryl. II 90 (early 3rd c.). In SB I 4664 (7th c.) a quarter "of the Olympic theater" is mentioned, which may or may not refer to a building that was used for *agones*.

[25] SB X 10493 (223), P.Oxy. XVII 2132 (circa 250), PSI Congr. XXI 12 (261) (reading uncertain), Pap. Agon. 8 (273), P.Oxy. XIV 1643 (298), CPR VI 41 (circa 320), BGU I 185 (2nd c.?), P.Fuad. I Univ. 7 (2nd c.?), P.Oxy. VII 1050 (3rd c.), P.Köln. X 418 (3rd–4th c.), PSI III 236 (3rd–4th c.). The last text mentions three xystarchs, probably responsible for different contests, all called 'brother' as a sign of amicability between colleagues. See Harland 2005: 510–11.

[26] For the Alexandrian *Olympia* see Pap.Agon. 7, see Strasser 2004–2005: 423–33; for the *Antinoeia* see Pap. Agon. 4 and P.Oxy. LXXIX 5208; for the *Paneia* see Pap.Agon. 3, cf. Van Rengen 1971 and Strasser 2004–2005: 465–67; for the *Kapitolia* of Antinoopolis see Pap.Agon. 9 and 10; for those of Oxyrhynchus see Pap.Agon. 1 and 8, P.Oxy. XLIII 3135 and XLV 3248. For the dates see Strasser 2004–2005: 434–39.

[27] In Pap.Agon. 3 (288), two officials of the artistic association – retired performing artists from Alexandrian and Antinoopolis – mention their citizenship of Lykopolis, normally acquired by a victory in the local games.

[28] Strasser 2004–2005: 434–39.

mainly second-rate athletes, who now had the opportunity to build a career locally.[29]

The *agones* in the late third and fourth centuries

As most of the games just mentioned are known only from one or two texts, it comes as no surprise that evidence on how long they continued is scanty. However, the reign of Diocletian and, from 293 on, his *caesar* Galerius clearly still belonged to the heyday that began under Gallienus. A list of victors (or participants), compiled in 289 or shortly after, of an annual contest in Oxyrhynchus, or perhaps in Naukratis, mentions several names for the first five years of the reign of Diocletian.[30] A short panegyric to Diocletian, preserved on papyrus, was held for the occasion of *Kapitolia* (either those of Antinoopolis or Oxyrhynchus).[31] A letter written during a visit of this emperor to Alexandria shows that permanent *agones* were complemented by once-only contests for special occasions: Dios, one of the participants in such *ad hoc* games for the emperor, wrote his sister about how he was selected to participate in the *pankration* competition, probably bluffing about his abilities, but failed because he was not trained for it. "I will tell you everything that has happened to me in Alexandria. So, when we arrived here, we didn't find the person whom we came looking for (but) we did find our lord the emperor visiting. He ordered that athletes be brought to the Campus and fortunately, I and the other five were selected, without the other athletes knowing. When I arrived there, I was at first paired up to do *pankration* and I had bad luck, as I do not know how to do *pankration*. So I was performing [poorly] for a long time . . . falling. The god was about to . . . I challenged the five to do *pammachon*. The emperor wanted to know whether (I could) so I was [immediately] summoned to do it one man after the other."[32] Luckily the organizers indeed introduced the

[29] P.Ryl. II 93 (3rd c.) lists participants in the running competitions of an unnamed contest (probably at Hermopolis or Antinoopolis): Hermopolis: 7, Antinoopolis: 7, Alexandria: 6, Oxyrhynchus: 2, Lykopolis: 1, Panopolis: 1, Thessalonike: 1, Ephesus: 1. See Decker 2010. Pap.Agon. 3 mentions the citizenships of local officials of the artistic association, which reflect where they won: most are citizens of several Egyptian cities and one is citizen of Hermopolis and Syrian Antioch.

[30] P.Oxy. XXII 2338. The editor interpreted this as a list of victors enjoying tax exemption; Coles 1975: 199–201, after correcting some readings, as a list of participants from Oxyrhynchus in games in Naukratis; and Van Rengen 1997: 292–93 as a list of victors (compiled for tax purposes) of the ephebic games of Oxyrhynchus, with a gymnastic competition modeled after the *Antinoeia* and an artistic competition for trumpeters, heralds, and poets modeled after games in Naukratis.

[31] P.Oxy. LXIII 4352.

[32] SB III 6222. Ll. 10–19 translated. For full translation, new edition, and commentary see Remijsen 2010a.

new event *pammachon*, following the latest fashion, and this contest Dios could win. After these athletic games held on the horse track (*campus*) of the nearby military town Nikopolis, he won another contest in the Lageion, the stadium/circus in the center of the capital.

The synods of athletes and artists likewise still appear in papyri of the late third century. These associations attracted new members because of the recent increase in games. In 288, Aurelius Hatres paid his membership fee of 850 *denarii* to the ἱερὰ μουσικὴ Διοκλητιανὴ καὶ Μαξιμιανὴ οἰκουμενικὴ περιπολιστικὴ μεγάλη σύνοδος at the seventh edition of the *Paneia*.[33] In a lease from 291, one of the two lessees belonged to the sacred synod, perhaps again that of the artists.[34] In a letter of 298, an official of the athletic synod, namely a xystarch for life who was also *periodonikes*, appointed another man to look for a runaway slave in Alexandria.[35] Despite this continuity, there were some difficulties. Already earlier in the third century, it had been difficult in many cities to find candidates for the more expensive liturgies. This topic was also on the agenda of the *boule* of Oxyrhynchus about 299: several candidates had been named for the office of *agonothetes* and now one of them had to be urged to accept the position.[36]

After the reign of Diocletian, the evidence for Greek athletics is mostly limited to Oxyrhynchus.[37] Both the annual ephebic games and the quadrennial *Kapitolia* are still attested under Constantine. On January 18, 323, the *logistes* – who became in the early fourth century the most important municipal official, with broad responsibilities – urged the ephebes to do their very best at the games of the next day. A unique term is used to describe this contest, namely the "σύμβλημα of the ephebes." This term is otherwise attested only in the sense of 'seam' or 'joint', but is derived from συμβάλλω, meaning 'throw together, bring together', but also 'pit people against each other, match people'.[38] As this is not the only rare word in this short text, it is most likely indicative of a literary style, not of an actual shift in terminology. A document from October 317 discusses expenses for the *Kapitolia* incurred a year before.[39] A letter of May 3, 328 deals with the appointment of an assistant to the *agonothetes* for the *Kapitolia* in the

[33] Pap.Agon. 3. [34] P.Oxy. XIV 1691. [35] P.Oxy. XIV 1643. [36] P.Oxy. XII 1416.

[37] P.Panop. 30, l. 16 (332): θέαις τ[ῶν] ἐπαρχειωτῶν, "shows of the provincials" has been interpreted as late evidence for the *Paneia* by the editors, but this is not convincing. Θεά is not a normal word for an *agon* in this period, but means 'show' (cf. p. 329). Late-antique provincial shows (e.g. a *venatio* or theater shows with mimes and pantomimes) would be expected in the provincial capital Ptolemais, not in Panopolis. This is consistent with the text, since the man who attended the shows in this papyrus was in that period unavailable for a liturgy in Panopolis, being away.

[38] P.Oxy. I 42. Cf. LSJ s.v. σύμβλημα and συμβάλλω. [39] P.Oxy. LXIII 4357.

autumn of 329.[40] This letter was addressed to the *logistes*, but apparently the appointment fell under the authority of the *praefectus Aegypti* as well (l. 9: τῆς ἐπαρχικῆς ἐξουσίας). An undated fourth-century account for various expenses mentions the ἐπαρ(χικός) Καπιτωλιακ(ός) ἀγών, which confirms the involvement of the *praefectus* in the athletic games of the fourth century.[41]

Likewise attesting the continuity of athletics in Oxyrhynchus are magical texts, such as a binding curse for two runners, from the third or fourth century, and a victory charm dated to the late third or early fourth century, asking for victory and safety in the stadium for Sarapammon son of Apollonios.[42] The charm text identifies Sarapammon by the name of his father, which is uncommon in magical texts, where normally the mother's name is used. The father's name, however, would be understandable if Sarapammon participated in a Greek *agon*, where being a free citizen was important and victors all identified themselves with the name of their father and town.[43] Considering the provenance of the charm, he may have been a competitor in the *Kapitolia*, most likely a boxer or pankratiast, as the charm asks for 'safety'.

It is unlikely that Oxyrhynchus was the only city that still had games in the early fourth century, but because there are fewer papyri from other cities we lack explicit references. There is a strong indication for Hermopolis, though. About 320, a landowner ordered his estate manager Apollonios to give wine to a xystarch.[44] The archive of the estate contains similar orders for the manager to give wine to a boxer and a poet.[45] The landowner may have thrown a private party with shows and asked the xystarch to find some athletes for a demonstration. Although this archive does not refer to a formal *agon*, the presence of a xystarch in Hermopolis around 320 does show that the games in Hermopolis and/or nearby Antinoopolis still existed at the time and continued to fall under the control of the international organization.

[40] P.Oxy. LX 4079 (and its duplicate 4080).

[41] P.Harr. I 97 V. The find spot is unknown, but the majority of papyri from the Harris collection are from Oxyrhynchus. This account contains various expenses, not all related to the *Kapitolia*. The reading of ἐπαρ(χικός) is not certain. Of the alternative readings (BL III, 81) ἐπάθ(λοις) Καπιτωλιακ(οῦ) ἀγῶν(ος) ("for the prizes of the Kapitolia") is the most likely with respect to the letter traces and the context of an account (cf. P.Oxy. LXIII 4357, note on ll. 13–15), but the use of ἔπαθλον in the meaning of prizes is not further attested in papyri and is therefore certainly not expected in abbreviated form. As the adjective ἐπαρχικός is the only possibility that occurs in another fourth-century text on the *Kapitolia*, this remains the most likely option.

[42] Tremel 2004: no. 10, P.Oxy. XII 1478.

[43] Cf. Tremel 2004: no. 4: a binding curse for the wrestling ephebe Attalos, son of Attalos, from Athens.

[44] CPR VI 41. [45] CPR VI 47, 50. For further discussion see pp. 247ff.

Two more magical texts attesting athletic competitions cannot be linked to a specific location. An early fourth-century magical handbook contains a charm to make an athlete invincible. The book comes from Thebes, but it is not clear if, where, and when this charm was actually used.[46] Another handbook contains a victory charm for a runner, including magical signs to be written on the big toenails.[47] A fourth-century curse binds three Egyptian competitors – all have a common Greek name such as Hierax, Antiochos, and Kastor alias Dioskoros, but an Egyptian mother's name – in a running event so that they would not "take a crown in the stadium."[48]

After Constantine, there is no more evidence for *agones* in Egypt, not even for Oxyrhynchus, nor for the activities of xystarchs. The disappearance of references to the agonistic circuit after this date, especially from the private documents – a substantial part of the third-century agonistic references are contained in private rather than public documents – is a significant indication of decline, because the number of papyri diminishes only gradually. Most Egyptian contests had probably disappeared by the second half of the fourth century. This *argumentum e silentio* cannot apply to Alexandria, however, as the capital is seriously underrepresented in the papyri. In the capital games certainly continued longer. In 364, Libanius wrote the *praefectus Aegypti* a request to send athletes to the *Olympia* of Antioch. He asked that the prefect make it clear to everyone that he did not think less of the contest in Antioch than of the contests in Egypt. He did not name specific contests, but the *Olympia* of Alexandria are certainly a likely candidate.[49] An active athletic scene in the capital is also implied in the letters of Isidorus, who was born about 360, studied in Alexandria, and afterwards lived as a monk in Pelousion. He left a large corpus of letters in a classicizing style with many agonistic metaphors. Isidorus creatively adapted the standard metaphors by referring to rather technical aspects such as the registration of athletes for the games or the fact that the *agonothetes* could decide to take a pause. In particular his use of the technical term *olympionikes* may stem from knowledge picked up during his years in Alexandria.[50]

Professional competitors and their privileges

The history of professional athletes competing on the agonistic circuit naturally follows the history of the *agones*. Professional competitors can

[46] Pap.Graec.Mag. I 4, ll. 2159–2160. [47] Pap.Graec.Mag. II 7, ll. 390–393. [48] SEG LVII 1985.
[49] Libanius, *Ep*. 1183. [50] Isidorus Pelusiota (SC 422), *Ep*. 1274, 1408, 1470, 1521, 1651.

easily be identified in the papyrological record by titles such as *periodonikes, olympionikes, pleistonikes, hieronikes*, and *paradoxos*, which victors continued to add to their names long after they retired from competition. *Hieronikes* is by far the most frequent title, as it sufficed to win one sacred contest to receive it. A variation only known from Oxyrhynchus, one of the few cities with sacred ephebic games, is ὁ τῶν ἐξ ἐφηβίας ἱερονικῶν. The tangible benefits connected to agonistic titles, that is the exemption from taxes and liturgies, explain only in exceptional cases, namely in tax lists, why such a title was mentioned in the document. In most cases, e.g. leases, contracts of sale, loans, etc., the titles were mentioned merely to underline the status of the relevant party, as the victories were very prestigious. Most papyri with agonistic titles date from the third century, when the local contest circuit of Egypt was developing. As this heyday continued into the reign of Diocletian, agonistic titles remain well attested in the late third century.[51] Some texts explicitly state that the victors still enjoyed privileges. In 292, for example, a certain Theodoros was exempted from traveling to the *praefectus* to attend his court of law on the ground of being a *hieronikes*.[52] Gaius Iulius Theon asked in a rather long-winded petition for exemption from taxes on account of being over sixty and moreover *hieronikes*.[53] About 300, the *hieronikes* Ausonius was accepted as supernumerary (ὑπὲρ τὸ(ν) ἀριθμόν) councillor in Hermopolis.[54] The many memberships of city councils of active top athletes suggest that they normally got this privilege soon after their victory, so Ausonius probably competed under Diocletian. Around the same time, an anonymous herald, retiring after a career of twenty-eight years, asked for a less familiar privilege, namely the function of official herald of the Heptanomia (Middle Egypt).[55] Previous emperors had declared that only professional competitors could be appointed to this function. A papyrus copy of a rescript in which Diocletian and his colleagues limited the freedom from liturgies to professional athletes who were triple *hieronikai* shows

[51] P.Lips. I 18 (*hieronikes* – 287–313), P.Oxy. XXVII 2477 (*hieronikes* – 289), IX 1205 (*paradoxos* – 291), XIV 1691 (member of the sacred synod – 291), I 59 (*hieronikes* – 292), XIV 1643 (*periodonikes* – 298), P.Flor. I 64 (*hieronikes* – late 3rd /early 4th c.). Pap.Agon. 3 (288) also mentions honorary citizenships. The *olympionikes, pythionikes*, and *paradoxos* among the graffiti at Abydos possibly date from roughly the same period (I.Memnonion 481=580, 500, and 526).

[52] P.Oxy. I 59. [53] P.Oxy. LXXIX 5210.

[54] P.Lips. I 18 (287–313). The ὑπὲρ τὸ(ν) ἀριθμόν means that Ausonius became councilor even though there were no vacancies.

[55] PSI XIV 1422 (probably 286–305). P.Oxy. XXVII 2477 (289) is perhaps a similar application for a privilege, but this text is too badly preserved to be understood completely.

that the Empire-wide legal framework of these privileges was known and implemented.[56]

As with the games, references to victors become scarcer in the early fourth century. The stricter rules regarding *hieronikai* probably led to the disappearance of the title '*hieronikai* from the ephebate' about 300. Contrary to what can be expected of titles used for life, this title disappears more than twenty years before the last reference to the ephebic games.[57] Because ephebic victors were not professional athletes, the restriction of privileges to the latter meant that this ephebic title became meaningless. Other agonistic titles, which did apply to professional athletes, are still attested in the first quarter of the fourth century.[58] These papyri document various business transactions of retired athletes, such as the sale of grain and land or loans. The men bearing these titles were not necessarily active as athletes in the early fourth century[59] – most probably competed under Diocletian – but they do show that agonistic titles were still significant, and hence that the *agones* were still a well-known and respected practice. There is, however, also evidence for Egyptian athletes whose active career fell in the reign of Constantine. A page from a household book of a large estate, from 321, or even 336, lists the costs of festivities: 6 *knidia* to the doctor Achilleus for an *Asklepia* feast, 20 *knidia* to the same man for a *Homeria* feast, 12 *knidia*, and later again 4 and 6, for actors, and 6 *knidia* for Dioskourides *paradoxos*.[60] *Paradoxos* is one of the less prestigious titles carried by professional athletes and, less commonly, performing artists.[61] The job for which Dioskourides was paid 6 *knidia* had nothing to do with the official circuit of *agones* – he was just making a little money on the side –, but the fact that he carried the typical title of a competitor on the circuit suggests that he competed in *agones* as well. The last known *hieronikai*, Pollon and Silvanus, son of Hermes, figure in a list of land-owners from about 350, which was no doubt compiled for tax purposes.[62]

[56] P.Lips. I 44. For this rescript see pp. 212 and 243ff.
[57] The two last instances are P.Oxy. XIV 1705 (298) and P.Laur. IV 154 (300).
[58] P. Oxy. LXXIX 5211 (*hieronikes* – 303), P.Oxy.Hels. 28 (*paradoxos* – 303–304), P.Lips. I 6 (*hieronikes* – 306), P.Oxy. LXIII 4354 (*hieronikes paradoxos* – 307), LV 3787 (*paradoxos* – 313–320?), P.Hamb. I 21 (*hieronikes pleistonikes paradoxos* – 315), P.Rain.Cent. 153 (*hieronikes* – 4th c.).
[59] An example of a *periodonikes* using his title about thirty years after his career is Aurelius Sarapammon alias Didymos, an international champion from Oxyrhynchus. He competed in the 260s and/or 270s (in SB 12.10772 he mentions competing in Antioch; for the date see Luijendijk 2008: 137) and still used the title *periodonikes* in a document from 298 (P.Oxy. 14.1643). For the identification of this man see Moretti 1958: 199–200.
[60] SPP XX 85 (early 4th c.). It is dated in the ninth year of an indiction. Cf. Harrauer 2004: 64–65.
[61] A *status quaestionis* in Gouw 2009: 123–26.
[62] P.Herm.Landl. 1 (G), ll. 182, 217; 2 (F), ll. 404, 427. For the date see Bowman 1985: 143.

Even if these two men were long retired, they cannot have competed earlier than the reign of Constantine. Both owned a small plot of land in the Hermopolite nome, where, as I have argued, games were indeed still held about 320. Other persons on the list are identified with their name and patronymic, which in some cases is replaced by their occupation or provenance. Titles are exceptional. The most likely reason why their title of *hieronikes* is explicitly mentioned in this list of landowners, at a time when it had apparently lost its significance in other contexts, is that *hieronikai* still enjoyed tax exemption. The rescript of Diocletian limited only the exemption from liturgies, and did not affect other privileges.[63]

Although the decline of references to local professional athletes is more or less contemporaneous with the disappearance of *agones* from our sources, the actual disappearance of competitors follows only after a delay of several decades, for the champion athletes were not limited to the contests in provincial towns. Menander Rhetor attests to the international reputation of Hermopolitan athletes in the late third or early fourth century.[64] The latest papyrological evidence for the activities of Egyptian athletes on the agonistic circuit is a petition by a man from (presumably) Herakleopolis to the *praeses* of the newly instituted province Augustamnica, in 343 or shortly afterwards.[65] In the lacunose text this man asks the governor for what seems to be the removal from a liturgy, arguing that he had incurred expenses for athletic training, and that his son was a victor. Because the right half of the document is not preserved, it is not quite clear whether he himself was an athlete as well. No specific games are mentioned, but as the man mentions being away

[63] P.Lips. I 44, Col. II ll. 3–4: *preaerogativas integras inlibatas servare* "that the privileges are valid completely and undiminished."

[64] Menander Rhetor 361 (ed. Russell and Wilson 1981): Αἱ δὲ κατὰ τὰς δυνάμεις ἐπιτηδεύσεις ῥητορικὴ καὶ ἀθλητικὴ καὶ ὅσαι τοιαῦται. Αἰγινῆται μὲν γὰρ ἐπὶ ἀθλητικῇ καὶ Ἑρμουπολῖται μεγαλοφρονοῦσι. "The accomplishments in the field of abilities are rhetoric, athletic, and the like. The Aeginetans are proud of their athletics and so (?) are the Hermopolitans." In this chapter, Menander (late 3rd – early 4th c.) discusses how to praise a city. In 360–361 he names three branches of accomplishments: knowledge, arts, and abilities. For each branch, he first explains which accomplishments belong to each of these three branches (e.g. astrology, geometry, music, etc. are types of knowledge) and then gives specific examples, both historical and recent (e.g. the Thebans are famous for flute-playing and the Alexandrians even nowadays for grammar, geometry, and philosophy). In the passage on abilities (δυνάμεις), Aegina is the traditional example – the city occurs often in the victory odes of Pindar – and Hermopolis, which had only been a *polis* for a century, the recent example. The passage is corrupt, though. In some old editions, ῥητορική was replaced by γυμναστική or θηρευτική. Some words seem to be missing: between Ἑρμουπολῖται and μεγαλοφρονοῦσι one expects δὲ ἐπὶ and a specific ability, perhaps παλαιστικῇ, as combat sports are sometimes regarded the local specialty.

[65] Hoogendijk 2012: 352.

and a victory "there," he is not talking about a local contest. There is no reference to the athletic synod, but he does refer to other '*stephanitai*'. While in the name of the synod, the word '*stephanitai*' always followed '*hieronikai*', here the word appears for the first time independently. It is, in other words, a new term for victor, perhaps even a special kind of victor such as a triple *hieronikai*. An innovation of the technical agonistic vocabulary may have been necessary because of the stricter rules put in place by Diocletian. In the capital, there was probably still an active athletic scene at the end of the century. In 388, Libanius wrote to the influential head of a school in Alexandria, with the request to act as an intermediary for the Antiochenes with the Egyptian governor. He wanted him to send those who had become famous in the gymnasia in Alexandria to Antioch.[66] In another letter, two young athletes are identified by name, Horos and Phanes. Libanius praised that they had made both their father and Egypt famous with their performance in the Olympics of Antioch, where the former had won.[67]

In 390, half a century after the last evidence for agonistic privileges, Asklepiades, son of Timotheos, was exempted from guard duty in a quarter of Hermopolis on the grounds of being an athlete.[68] This exemption is significantly different from the privileges of the past: not his athletic victories, but his athletic occupation forms the ground for exemption. For more than a millennium Greek athletics had been all about the honor of the victor and imperial-age athletes were therefore mostly referred to by their honorific titles. In the second half of the fourth century, the athletes in the papyri were referred to with the generic ἀθλητής or by their specialty, e.g. Sois the boxer. These men did not participate in *agones*, which did no longer exist outside the capital, but entertained people at other festivities. While the *hieronikai* of the early fourth century were owners of land or businesses and mingled with the ruling class, later fourth-century athletes are found among carpenters, donkey-drivers, gang-members, and hired laborers (see Chapter 10).[69]

[66] Libanius, *Ep*. 843. [67] Libanius, *Ep*. 1278.

[68] P.Lips. I 66. The exact reason for Asklepiades' replacement is not legible: [c.4]θέντ(ος) ὡς ἀθλητής.

[69] P.Oxy. XLVIII 3426 (360–370): Isidoros the athlete is paid a small sum by a wine merchant for a chore; CPR VIII 44 (4th c.): a list of people who bought grass, e.g. a carpenter, a donkey-driver, Sois the boxer; P.Lond. V 1831 (4th c.): ὁ ἀπὸ ἀθλητῶν, content unclear; P.Herm. 20 (4th c.): petition against three men, among them Anoubion the athlete, who had, at the instigation of a female ringleader, given a thrashing to the brother of the petitioner; P.Oxy. LXXIX 5212 (5th c.): order for delivery of two pounds of meat to "the athletes."

The decline of athletics at the gymnasium

Archaeological indications about the continuation of athletics in gymnasia are generally lacking in Egypt. One exception is the new imperial bath complex of Alexandria from the reign of Constantius II (337–360). The palaistra has not yet been excavated, but has been located on the basis of porticoes, of a nearby statue of Herakles, and of the gymnasium's place in the street pattern.[70] Likewise in Alexandria in the Constantinian period, an epitaph for a young man celebrated the traditional two sides of education, that is the intellectual and the physical side: Dioskoros was called "wise in the arts of the Muses and a new Herakles" and depicted naked.[71] Both the comparison with Herakles and his nudity mean that he practiced athletics, possibly as an ephebe. The thin crown at the top of the relief is a reference to victory.

More evidence for the end of amateur athletics in Egypt comes from south of the Nile Delta, where the papyri allow us to follow the offices of gymnasiarch and *kosmetes* until their disappearance. Gymnasiarchs and ex-gymnasiarchs are still common in papyri from the first half of the fourth century. There are more attestations from the first than from the second quarter, but even in the second quarter there is still a good geographic spread (Antinoopolis, the Arsinoite nome, Herakleopolis, Hermopolis, and Oxyrhynchus). This shows that in most Egyptian cities men were appointed to heat the gymnasia and provide oil for the visitors at least until the mid fourth century.[72] Already in the third century, it was at times hard to find candidates for this function, even for very short terms, as is well attested for Hermopolis in the 260s.[73] The financial difficulties of certain members of the curial class did not lead to the immediate demise of the gymnasium, though. At Oxyrhynchus, gymnasiarchs – or ex-gymnasiarchs, the distinction is sometimes difficult to make due to abbreviations – are attested until 370. Again, this does not necessarily mean that traditional practices continued longer in Oxyrhynchus than elsewhere; there are simply more papyri preserved.

[70] Kołątaj 1992: 56. For the date of the baths see Kiss 2007: 190.

[71] I.Métr.Ég. 82 (pl. VII): Δάκρυσον εἰσορόων με Διόσκορον Ἑλλάδος υἱόν, τὸν σοφόν ἐν Μούσαις καὶ νέον Ἡρακλέα.

[72] See for a list Sijpesteijn 1986: 45–50, 53, 67. The date for P.Rain.Cent. 90 (414/415?) is too late (BL IX, 223); the document still belongs to the fourth century. Add for Hermopolis: CPR XVII.A 6 (316), 9b-11, 14 (320), 16–22 (321), SB XVIII 13769 (345–352?), XX 14657 (circa 300–310); for the Arsinoite nome: SB XXIV 15967 (4th/5th c.); for Oxyrhynchus: P.Oxy. LIV 3758 (325), LXI 4129, 4130 (358), LXV 4491 (307), PSI Congr. XX 16 (330–340?).

[73] Orth 1983: 225–31, van Minnen 2000: 453–68.

The fact that gymnasiarchs were still appointed in the provincial cities of Upper Egypt does not imply, however, that athletics was still practiced in these gymnasia. The word 'gymnasium' could be used for mere bath-houses.[74] The appointment of a municipal official who was responsible for heating the baths and providing oil indicates a continuing institutionalized respect for the body, though not necessarily for the well-trained body. The disappearance of *kosmetai*, on the other hand, the officials responsible for the ephebes, is more illuminating for the decline of athletics.[75] In the first three decades of the fourth century, *kosmetai*, who are considerably less common in papyri than gymnasiarchs, are attested in Oxyrhynchus and the Arsinoite nome.[76] The Arsinoite examples show that Oxyrhynchus, with its ephebic games in 323, was no exception.[77] In Tokra in Cyrenaica, the city walls contain numerous graffiti of ephebes, many of them dated. The most recent is from 280/281. Clearly, here too the ephebate was organized at least until the late third century.[78]

In Antinoopolis, a *kosmetes* was appointed as late as 347. In a letter from this year, the *logistes* – who supervised the ephebate in the fourth century – reminded the *kosmetes* to serve one month of his office, which was apparently not continuous, in the month Mesore.[79] His responsibility is described with the traditional term εὐκοσμία: the well-ordered manner in which the young men of the city were supposed to behave. Antinoopolis had a strong ephebic tradition, as its ephebic games were instituted by the founder Hadrian. This may have stimulated the citizens to continue organizing the ephebate and to have their sons participate in it, even when this institution was waning elsewhere. The division of the office into several terms may suggest that this ephebate was not a full-time program of a year, but that the boys trained together during short periods spread over the year, probably in preparation of certain festivities, for example a procession in which the ephebes would march together, in the traditional well-ordered manner. It is not clear, however, whether the ephebic program was more intensive in the preceding centuries.

Like professional athletics, amateur athletics probably lingered longest in the capital. In a letter to the grammarian Agathodaimon from about 400, Isidorus of Pelousion noticed that not all children exercising with a

[74] van Minnen 2006: 160. [75] Cf. Legras 1999: 185–87.

[76] P.Oxy. L 3573 (circa 300 – Oxyrhynchus), PSI VI 716 (306 (?) – Oxyrhynchus), P.Oxy. XIV 1645 (308 – Oxyrhynchus), P.Cair.Isid. 14 (circa 311–314 – Karanis), 12 (313–314 – Karanis), P.Sakaon 66 (328 – Theadelphia), BGU XVII 2700 (4th c. – Oxyrhynchus), O.Medin.Madi. 6, 9 (4th c.– Narmouthis).

[77] P.Oxy. I 42. [78] SEG IX 446 (280/281), 521 (274/5). Cf. Luni 1976: 256. [79] P.Ant. I 31.

paidotribes became athletes. Clearly, athletics was still a part of the education of some upper class children as late as 400.[80]

Horse racing and new opportunities for athletes

With the disappearance of the Egyptian *agones* by the mid fourth century, a career in competition was no longer an option for well-to-do boys. Around the same time, athletics also disappeared as an important aspect of their education. These two evolutions excluded from athletics the very section of the population that had previously supported its success as an honorable career or pastime. Athletics itself did not disappear, however. Already in the early imperial period, some athletes, mostly boxers and pankratiasts, had earned money by demonstrating their skills and strength in fights that were organized as side entertainment at all kinds of festivities. This type of athlete benefitted from the introduction of Roman horse races, which offered regular opportunities to compete.

Before the fourth century horse races were already held in Egypt in the context of Greek *agones*, but independent horse races after the Roman example, organized purely for the entertainment of the spectators, were known only in Alexandria, which was far more cosmopolitan than the *metropoleis*.[81] Antinoopolis had had a monumental circus since the second century, but this was built for the *Megala Antinoeia* and later also used for *Kapitolia*.[82] Egypt did not have an architectural tradition of stadia, because originally only Alexandria had athletic games. When Hadrian endowed the city with sports infrastructure suitable for the athletic and equestrian events of an *agon*, he opted for a grand circus in the Roman style.[83] Oxyrhynchus had a hippodrome quarter (ἄμφοδον ἱπποδρόμου) in the first three centuries AD, but this had nothing to do with racing. The quarter is best attested in the first century, long before there is any evidence for games, either in the Greek or Roman style. It was probably named after an old site used for the training of horses by the army: other papyri mention a "quarter

[80] Isidorus Pelusiota, *Ep.* 1671.

[81] For Greek races see Pap.Agon. 9, 10, P.Oxy. XVII 2144, XLIII 3135. For some texts, dated vaguely to the third or fourth century, it is difficult to determine whether the horse races were held in the Greek or in the Roman style, e.g. P.Oxy. XXXI 2598. For independent races see e.g. Dio Chrysostomus, *Or.* 31.31, 40–6, 74–90 and Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 5.26. In P.Oxy. XXXI 2553, l. 13, a late second- or early third-century calendar of imperial cult offerings, the unknown member of the imperial bureaucracy in charge of them presided over horse races in the Lageion: ἐν τῷ Λαγείῳ καθέζετ(αι) ἱππ[ ]. The editor hesitantly locates these cult offerings in Oxyrhynchus but, as the Lageion was the Alexandrian hippodrome, the man evidently presided over horse races in the capital.

[82] Pap.Agon. 9 attests the equestrian competition of the *Kapitolia*.

[83] Humphrey 1986: 513–16.

of the camp of the cavalrymen" (ἄμφοδον ἱππέων παρεμβολῆς) and sometimes even a "*campus* of the cavalrymen" (κάμπος ἱππέων), with the Latin word for such military training grounds. The latter can be located in the northwest part of town.[84] Since the quarters never appear in the same text, however, "quarter of the hippodrome," "quarter of the camp of the cavalrymen," and "quarter of the *campus* of the cavalrymen" may very well all be synonyms, with 'hippodrome' being the translation of '*campus*'. This area was already built over in 64.[85] The equestrian events of the *Kapitolia* as well as the Byzantine horse races must have taken place outside the center, probably on the long mound of about 400 by 100 meters to the northeast of the city.[86]

In the early fourth century, Roman-style horse racing grew popular throughout the East.[87] In Alexandria, this seems to have led to a professionalization of the organization. In 315, the village Karanis in the Fayoum sent three deliveries of barley to Hephaistion, *hippotrophos* of Alexandria – the liturgical official who provided races – and at the same time *factionarius* of the Blues. This is the first attestation of the circus factions in Egypt.[88] In this text, the Blues are not called Βένετοι, the Latin transliteration under which the Blues came known throughout the East, but Καλλάϊνοι, the more rarely used translation.[89] A few years later, in the Hermopolite archive of the estate manager Apollonios, 6 *knidia* of wine were given to a man who seems to have been working for the Blues as well.[90] The absence of other fourth-century sources suggests that the circus factions did not yet play a role in the *chora*, however. The man from the archive may have been visiting from Alexandria, like the only other known official of the Blues in the fourth century.

Outside of Alexandria, horse races were not held as popular entertainment independent of *agones* before the second half of the fourth century.

[84] References collected in Krüger 1990: 83–86, nos. 10 and 24. See also maps on pp. 371–74. The ναυκλῆροι ἱπποδρομῖται ("the shipowners with offices along the hippodrome (?)") from Memphis (BGU VIII 1741) and the hippodrome mentioned in a fragmentary petition from Herakleoplis (BGU VIII 1854), both from the first century BC, most likely refer to military training grounds for horses as well.

[85] P.Mich. III 179, ll. 12–13: ἐν τῷ πρότερον τῶν Ἱππέων Κάμπωι οἰκίαν.

[86] Padró 2007: 136.

[87] Cameron 1976: 201–14.

[88] P.Cair.Isid. 57 and 58.

[89] Besides the two early fourth-century papyri, it is attested in three curse tablets from Syria (Tremel 2004: nos. 11, 17, 19) and P.Strasb. IV 287 (6th c.) and BGU XII 2201 (656), both from Hermopolis. See also *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum* II.337.28–9; III.174.9 (ed. Goetz 1888): translations not necessarily linked to the circus.

[90] CPR VI 63. Because the text is only partially preserved, the editor thought that it concerned some unknown blue commodities (. . . ο̣ὐστων καλλαΐνων), but as one expects a person here, the suggestion [κελ]λ̣α̣ρίτ̣ου τῶν Καλλαΐνων by Gascou (1983: 226–27) is preferable. For the implications for the organization of entertainment in the fourth century see the longer discussion in Chapter 11.

The liturgy of *hippotrophos* is first attested at Oxyrhynchus in 370. It was counted among the "heavier liturgies."[91] The specific liturgy suggests that by this date, horse races were already institutionalized. They involved a lot of organization and personnel. An archive from the same city, probably from the second half of the fourth century, contains orders for the payment of wine to this personnel.[92] The circus factions played no role in these early races. They were probably introduced in the provincial cities in the fifth century – for which we have little information – and play a major role in the more abundant evidence from of the sixth century, when the circus had become very popular.[93] The most interesting texts from this period, with respect to the continuity of athletics, are the so-called circus programs, of which seven are now published. Four of them list various shows, but no circus races. Three other programs mention rounds of horse races alternated by other shows, including acrobats, actors, a staged hunt, and demonstration matches of athletes.[94] Of the Byzantine programs published to date, only one calls such circus athletes ἀθληταί, which was also the normal word for athletes up to the fourth century. Three others call them γυμνικοί or ξυστός instead, which points to a more flexible use of the athletic vocabulary at the Byzantine circus than at the traditional *agones*.[95]

[91] P.Oxy. XVII 2110: τὰς βαρυτέρας λειτουργίας. This expression is paralleled in Julian, *Misopogon* 43 (no. Budé), where οἱ ἱπποτροφοῦντες of Antioch are mentioned as an example of those responsible for ταῖς βαρυτάταις λειτουργίαις of the city.

[92] O.Ashm.Shelt. 83–190. Shelton dates it to the fourth century on paleographical grounds. His suggestion that it should be dated before the currency changes of circa 351 is based on slender evidence. I examined the frequency of the names in the archive with the *Trismegistos* database. The forty-five legible and not unique names in this archive are the expected mix of about two-thirds traditional names (e.g. Asklepiades, Demetrios, Ischyrion, etc.) – no longer as popular as before, but attested at least until the sixth century due to family naming traditions – and one-third late-antique names. Five names among these (Eustathios, Komasios, Kyriakos, Papnoutis, Victor), i.e. 10 percent of all names in the archive, are rare before circa 340. This suggests that the archive belongs to the second rather than the first half of the century.

[93] Wipszycka 1969: 190–98, Gascou 1976. Bagnall 1993: 104–05 argues for a rapid introduction of horse racing in Egypt in the fourth century, but this is mainly based on the early date of the racing archive, which he himself considers based on little evidence. P.Oxy. LXXIX 5205, a fifth-century curse on the horses of the Blues, is the earliest indisputable evidence for factional involvement in the organization of games.

[94] With races: P.Oxy. XXXIV 2707, P.Bingen 128, P.Oxy. LXXIX 5216. Without races: P.Harrauer 56, P.Oxy. LXXIX 5215, 5217, 5218. The latter two, however, are too incomplete to exclude that they originally did list horse races.

[95] P.Bingen 128, l. 8: ἀθληταί; P.Oxy. XXXIV 2707, l. 13: ξυστός; P.Oxy. LXXIX 5215, ll. 4, 7 and 5218, Fr. 1: γυμνικο[. For the meaning of *xystos* in this context see pp. 250–51.

CHAPTER 5

Italy

The agonistic tradition

Southern Italy and Sicily belonged to the Greek world and its agonistic tradition from the archaic period: while the *poleis* of Magna Graecia already sent athletes to Olympia in the seventh century BC, they competed here with remarkable success in the sixth and particularly the fifth centuries. These international successes suggest that there was ample opportunity to train. There is some evidence for local games, which occasionally may even have attracted competitors from the mainland.[1] From the fourth century on, the number of Italian victors at the top games in Greece decreased.[2]

In the rest of Italy, the influence of Greek culture was less strong and games followed the Roman tradition, where the participants, considered performers rather than competitors, were subjected to a limitation of their civil rights, if they were free at all.[3] There was a local type of athletic contests, especially boxing matches, but Rome did not have the same broad set of competitive sports, and the matches served in the first place to entertain a crowd, not to reinforce the civic identity of the competitors as in the Greek world. The local athletic contests took place in the theater, and in the circus during the intervals between races, to keep the crowd from getting bored.[4] From the second century BC on, demonstration matches of Greek athletes were occasionally held in the capital, with competitors imported from

[1] Pindar, *Ol.* 13.11–112 vaguely refers to games in Sicily, where the family of Xenophon of Corinth won. A fifth-century coin from Metapontum with the legend ΑΧΕΛΟΙΟ ΑΕΘΛΟΝ documents games for the river god Acheloos. For an image see http://www.snible.org/coins/hn/lucania.html#76. Syracusan tetradrachms with the legend ΑΘΛΑ may perhaps be interpreted as prize money for local games. Cf. Nollé 2012: 7.

[2] Remijsen 2009b: 173, 176–77.

[3] For the legal status of *infamia* see pp. 323ff.

[4] E.g. Terentius, *Hecyra* 33–36; Horace, *Ep.* 2.1.183–186; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae* 7.72–73 (who as a Greek is keen to see similarities with Greek traditions). Cf. Thuillier 1996: 113–16.

Greece. These were not organized as independent contests, however, but added to *munera* or *ludi* as an exotic extra show.[5]

The first Greek *agones* on Italian soil were the *Sebasta* of Naples, instituted in AD 2.[6] Before, the *ludi pro valetudine Caesaris* had already been held in Rome every four years for two decades from 28 BC. These had an important athletic component, but still differed from typical *agones* in that they ended with an armed combat – Romans wanted to see a show – and were presided over by *collegiae* of Roman priests.[7] Naples on the other hand, being originally a Greek city, introduced games according to the Greek pattern. Here, rich Romans with country houses in Campania could indulge in watching athletic contests and exercising in the palaistra, years before this became an acceptable pastime in Rome itself. In the villas of Campania athletic scenes were also beloved topics for wall-paintings.[8]

In Rome too Greek contests gradually came to be appreciated in their own right. At the latest under Tiberius, jurists acknowledged that competitors in the *agones* were not infamous entertainers, but respectable citizens of Greek towns.[9] While the first real *agon* in Rome, the *Neroneia*, disappeared immediately after Nero's *damnatio memoriae*, in 86 a permanent contest, the *Kapitolia*, was successfully established in the capital by Domitian. This emperor likewise suffered from a *damnatio memoriae*, but in this case the games could survive, as they were named after the Capitoline triad rather than after the emperor himself. They instantly made Rome one of the main stops for traveling athletes. The prize for the victors included a great honor for members of the provincial elite: Roman citizenship.[10]

With the success of the *Kapitolia*, the number of Greek athletes in the capital grew. Second-century athletes participating in Tarentum in January would spend the rest of the winter in Italy, preparing for the *Kapitolia* in late May.[11] The modern bathing complexes in the capital and its surroundings provided them with good training facilities. The importance of Rome

[5] Caldelli 1993a: 15–21.

[6] The best-attested contest is that of AD 14, shortly before Augustus' death, which was an even year not divisible by four. I.Napoli I 52 (= IG XIV 748) records a victory in the forty-third Italid. This inscription was erected in 171 (consular date), so the forty-third Italid must be 170, and the first AD 2. Cf. Geer 1935: 216.

[7] Caldelli 1993a: 21–24.

[8] Bohne 2011: K2–14, K28–43, K64.

[9] *Dig.* 3.2.4. This excerpt from Ulpian refers to Sabinus and Cassius, jurists active under Tiberius.

[10] Herz 1996: 257.

[11] For the dates of the games of Tarentum in January of the winter following the Olympics and the *Kapitolia* in May/June of the same year, see Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 2, ll. 63–64. Crossing the Mediterranean in midwinter was generally avoided. Cf. Vegetius, *De re militari* 4.39.

Map 5 Map of the western Mediterranean.

for the athletes increased further under Antoninus Pius, when the athletic association moved into headquarters in the capital. The presence of famous athletes from the East stimulated the popularity of athletics among the Roman population. Exercising in the palaistra became a normal pastime for well-off residents of Rome and Greek athletics became a common theme in the decoration of the baths, not only in the form of idealized statues of athletes, which had long been popular as representations of Greek high culture, but also in the form of more realistic depictions on mosaics. Well-known examples are the black-and-white mosaics from Ostia.[12] The exercises in the palaistra were restricted to the private sphere of life, as Romans continued to refrain from competing in athletic

[12] Bohne 2011: K15–24. For a fuller discussion of these mosaics see Newby 2002 and 2005: 45–87.

events publicly. They did enjoy watching the contests, however. That an early third-century mosaic on the floor of an inn at Ostia depicts the famous boxers Alexander and Helix indicates that the public was familiar with these champions.

South of the cosmopolitan capital Greek athletics grew in popularity too. In Campania, a new sacred and eiselastic contest, the *Eusebeia*, was introduced in Puteoli in 142.[13] They were scheduled between the Roman *Kapitolia* and the Napolitan *Sebasta*, in order to join this regional circuit. At Beneventum, a small epigraphic fragment mentions a xystarch, but there is no context to prove that he also officiated in that city.[14] At the foot of Italy, Tarentum had its sacred *Eleusinia*, which probably date from the reign of Hadrian, and a talent contest in the early third century.[15] Nearby Brundisium had a thematic contest as well.[16] Athletic champions were famous in the entire region. In Regium Iulium in the toe of the peninsula, an early third-century mosaic in the same style as the black-and-white mosaics from Ostia depicts either the famous pankratiast Demostratos Damas or, more likely, his son.[17] On Sicily, only Syracuse is known to have had games, but because contests in the south never became as prestigious as those in the capital and Campania, they are underrepresented in the inscriptions.[18]

Despite the great popularity of athletics in the capital, the *Kapitolia* remained the only permanent contest for more than a century, even though one-off contests were sometimes organized for special occasions, such as a military victory.[19] Caracalla wanted to introduce permanent *Antoninia Pythia* in 214, but these disappeared again after his death.[20] In 242, Gordian III established a new contest, to be held every four years immediately after the *Kapitolia*, which did survive its founder's death. Gordian dedicated it to Athena Promachos, hoping that this goddess – famously associated with the Greek victory in the Persian wars – would help him in his upcoming expedition against the Persians.[21] This contest was embedded in

[13] Caldelli 1993a: 43–45. Add as evidence the more recently discovered mosaic in Bohne 2011: K44.
[14] Appendix to CIL IX 1663.
[15] For the sacred games see Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 2, ll. 63–64, SEG XLIII 731, and SEG LI 1067. For the talent games see IGLS IV 1265. SEG XXXIV 1022 is the epitaph of the Alexandrian M. Aurelius Serenus, a secretary of the athletic association who died at Tarentum, most likely in attendance of the games. Cf. Strasser 2001: 135–55.
[16] SEG VI 203. [17] Flesca 2004–2005. Also Bohne 2011: K47.
[18] IK Keramos 15 (1st c.). Cf. Strasser 2004b: 550–51.
[19] E.g. the *epinikia* of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, and the millennium games of Philip the Arab. Cf. Robert 1970: 11.
[20] Strasser 2004a (refutation of Robert 1970: 18–27, who dates these games to Elagabalus).
[21] Wallner 2004.

the regional circuit of the *Kapitolia* and the major contests of Campania in the summer of the second year of the Olympiad. In late 274, Aurelian founded a third sacred contest in Rome, the *agon Solis*, to be held on December 25.[22] These games were not scheduled in the existing local circuit, but about half a year later. The *agon Solis* (or *Helieia* in Greek) would therefore have been very difficult to combine with the winter *Nemea*, which were celebrated about ten days earlier. A contest in an average town would not have been able to deal with the competition from a *periodos* contest, but a contest in Rome could.

In the other three years of the Olympiad, athletics would be limited to occasional demonstration matches by less talented competitors, as special events at a bath complex or in the context of other shows. Hence in comparison to horse races, shows in the amphitheater, mimes, and pantomimes, athletics remained a minor player in the Roman entertainment sector.

While *agones* were relatively infrequent in comparison to Roman shows, as a decorative image and a leisurely activity athletics was extremely fashionable. Although most decorative athletic scenes come from Latium and Campania,[23] the fashions of Rome set a trend for the entire West. Stylish images of athletes are attested in northern Italy, where competitive athletics never spread, for example painted on walls in Sirmione on Lake Garda, but also by third-century mosaics found as far afield as Aquincum on the Pannonian border (now Budapest).[24] The influence of Roman fashions was also fundamental for the introduction of athletics in Africa, and its increasing popularity in southern Gaul.

The end of the Roman headquarters of the association

Antoninus Pius gave the international athletic association, the so-called 'xystic synod', headquarters in the capital, known in Latin as the *curia*

[22] The year is based on (Jerome) *Eusebius Caesariensis Chronicon* (ed. Helm 1956) A. 275: *Aurelianus templum Soli aedificat et Romam firmioribus muris vallat. Primus agon Solis ab Aureliano institutus*. In one manuscript this entry falls under the year 274. This is the more logical date, as by December 275 Aurelian had died. Salzman 1981: 221–23 places these games in October, during the Roman *ludi Solis*, as did P. J. Meier in RE I.1 (1893), col. 867, but through a more elaborate argument. Caldelli 1993a: 50–52 disproves Meier's argument and concludes we cannot know the date. Gouw 2009: 47 places the contest in the summer, close to the *Kapitolia*. All refer to Julian, *Or*. 11.41 (no. Budé, i.e. 4.155B in Loeb), but do not read on to 42 (or 4.156C), where Julian comes back to the *agon* and places it explicitly between the end of the month of Kronos (a reference to the *Saturnalia* in mid-December) and the New Year's feast. Wissowa (1912: 367) on this basis connected the *agon* with the feast for Sol Invictus, i.e. the *Natalis Invictus* on December 25.

[23] Bohne 2011: K2–25, K27–45, K48–60, K62–64, K67.

[24] Bohne 2011: K65 (Sirmione), K124–25 (Aquincum).

athletarum. Rausa has located this building underneath the church of San Pietro in Vincoli.[25] Inscriptions from this area provide a relatively good picture of the synod's activities in the fourth century. A long inscription of 313 or shortly afterwards records a donation to the synod by the family of the Apollonii (IGUR I 246, B 9–10: τὰ δοσείδια ... τὰ τῶν Ἀπολλωνίων).[26] This donation was stipulated in the will of Cl. Apollonios alias Eudoxios and his son Cl. Rufus alias Psapharios (A 2–3, 7–8, B 12). Both deceased were former high priests of the synod. Cl. Apollonios can be identified with the *periodonikes* Cl. Apollonios, who succeeded his father Cl. Rufus alias Apollonios in the high priesthood, as known from an earlier inscription.[27] The younger Cl. Rufus was an athlete too. His "athletic toils" are referred to in the inscription under discussion (B 14: ἐν τῇ ἀθλήσει κάμνω) and he was nicknamed Psapharios ('covered in dust'), which refers to the dust athletes sprinkled on their oiled skin. The remaining Apollonii, one male relative again called Cl. Apollonios alias Eudoxios and at least four women, probably the brother and sisters of Cl. Rufus alias Psapharios,[28] managed the estates of the deceased Apollonii and fulfilled the promise in the will.

The donation consisted of the capital stipulated in the will complemented with an extra sum from the pockets of the living Apollonii. The inscription specifies some uses for this money: funds for different *agones*, such as the *agon* of Athena Promachos (A 16) and the *agon* of Sol/Helios

[25] Rausa 2004.

[26] IGUR I 246. For an Italian translation of fragment B see Buonocore 1987: nr. 19.

[27] Cf. IGUR I 244. For the current location of this inscription see SEG XLVIII 1289. The writing points to a third-century date. On the basis of the style (the avoidance of specific information, such as specialty and contests, and the preference for a more literary formulation as ἐν τοῖς σκάμμασιν), I would place it in the second half of the third century (consistent with the identification of Cl. Apollonii with the deceased in IGUR I 246), but an earlier date remains possible. In that case, Cl. Apollonios alias Eudoxios would have to be identified as the son or, more likely considering the usual onomastic practice, the grandson of the first Cl. Apollonios.

[28] Cl. Apollonios is described as τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν and Cl. Rufus as τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ ἡμῶν (B 12). Harland 2005: 511 interprets this as the use of kinship terms between members of an association – probably misled by the commentary of Moretti, who, following Kaibel and Mommsen, interpreted the inscription as emanating *ab sociis nonnullis sacrae xysticae synodi*. However, the 'we' in this inscription are the Apollonii, i.e. a family, who address the synod with 'you' (B 17: δι' ὑμῶν τοῦ σύνπαντος ξυστοῦ). The men of this family were members of the synod, but the women were not. The remaining Apollonii are called Cl. Apollonios alias Eudoxios (B 21: τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ ἡμῶν), [Cl.] Karterion alias Melite, Cl. Eudoxion alias ?, ? alias Euphronion, and Cl. Bassa alias Alexandra (A 4–5). The names of the younger Apollonios alias Eudoxios and of Claudia Eudoxion clearly fit the family tradition. 'Brother' and 'father' represent, in other words, actual family relations. If they were used literally, the older Cl. Apollonios had at least two sons and four daughters. It is possible that the terms were used more freely and refer to cousins, nephews, and nieces as well, though the description of another relative Longina as συγγενίς (A 29) supports the more literal reading.

(A 17: Ἠλείοις[29]) and honorary monuments (B 6). On these monuments, the *xystos* would be named as dedicator, as was appropriate since the money became officially theirs. By publishing these arrangements on stone, however, the Apollonii could present themselves as the real donors and share in the honor.

The reasons for the erection of the very long inscription on this matter were more complicated than mere euergetism, however. It is clear that at the time the text was written, several months had passed since the donation should have been paid out to the synod, and therefore interest had to be paid by the Apollonii as well. The exact financial transactions are difficult to understand: originally there were four stelae, but the first has been preserved only for about a third of its width and only one other stela (the second or third) is preserved more or less complete. It appears that the donated capital was lent to a certain Zotike for the creation of interest (A 11–21, B 15). A second woman, Longina, a cousin of the Apollonii, managed the money as banker for the synod (A 28, B 2–5). Several things seem to have gone wrong in the time-span between the death of Cl. Rufus and the erection of the stelae (e.g. A 27: a fine for recklessness, B 17–18: previous stelae are destroyed). It is not entirely clear who was at fault, but the Apollonii obviously wanted to make sure that they were safe from further demands for money by the synod and therefore published these elaborate transactions.

The only legible amount is 25 denarii. In his edition Moretti, following Kaibel, identified this sum as the 1 percent said to have been added to the original capital. This interpretation implies an original sum of 2,500 denarii, which is, however, far too low to be recorded in such an elaborate inscription. As a single victor could receive 12,500 or 25,000 denarii as a prize in the early fourth century[30], the total cost of an *agon* would have been close to half a million denarii, if not more. A likelier explanation of the amounts is that the living Apollonii added 1 percent of the original capital (A 11: τὴν ποσότητα πᾶσαν εἰσενενκεῖν ἅμα τῷ ἑκατοστ[ῷ]), as a special gesture or in order to make up for the earlier problems. The interest to be paid on top of the gift (A 13: τὴν δωρεὰν εἰσηνένκαμεν καὶ τὸν τόκον μέχρι σήμε[ρον]) was actually the interest on the 1 percent given by the living

[29] The editor of IGUR I 246 read this as 'for the Eleans' (Ἠλείοις with *spiritus lenis*), but as we expect a contest rather than a city, and given the context of this inscription preferably a contest in Rome, the addition of a *spiritus asper*, which gives us the Greek name of the *agon Solis*, is the more likely reading. The disappearance of the iota of the Ἡλίεια is a common effect of iotacism.

[30] Depicted on the mosaics from Capsa (Bohne 2011: K89) and Piazza Armerina (Bohne 2011: K26b; Carandini, Ricci, and de Vos 1982: 272).

Apollonii (A 14: τὸν μὲν δοθέντα *παρ' ἡμῶν* τόκον τουτέστιν δηνάρια εἴ[κοσι καὶ πέντε) and was 25 denarii for each contest (A 15–16: [εἰς ἕνα ἕκα]στον ἀγῶνα δηνάρια εἴκοσι πέντε). We do not know at what rate this interest was calculated, but in any case this would mean that each contest received a considerable fund (capital + 1 percent + interest on the 1 percent), worthy of being recorded.

Though incomplete and badly understood, the inscription shows clearly that the athletic synod retained a complex organization in the early fourth century: there was a large board of chief secretaries, secretaries in office, high priests, and archons (B 2–4). That three generations of the Apollonii had been high priests – the hereditary character of the high priesthood is attested since the late second century – gave this family a particular influence. Apparently Rufus alias Psapharios had no son to succeed him as high priest – his siblings are managing his estate – but the younger Cl. Apollonios alias Eudoxios (a younger brother or nephew) was chief secretary and their cousin Longina managed the synod's money. This of course does not mean that the synod had become a family business. There were multiple high priests, as the high priesthood was hereditary within several families and new high priests could be appointed besides them. The man actually in charge about 313 was the πρῶτος ἀρχιερεύς M. Aur. Rhodon (B 10).

Half a century later, the headquarters were still reasonably well staffed. A law from 368 or 370 ordered the appointment of an ἀρχίατρος for each city district of Rome, except those of the port, the *xystos*, and the Vestal virgins, which suggests that the athletic association still had its own doctor.[31] An athlete who may have used the services of that doctor is Philoumenos, the greatest champion of his time, who received a statue at the headquarters in Rome in 375–378. Since stone monuments for athletic champions and other private citizens had gone out of fashion about a century earlier, the honor for Philoumenos was exceptional. The initiative and money for the statue came from the athletic association, which seems to have clung relatively long to this traditional habit. A part of the aforementioned donation went to statues as well.[32] The synod asked and recorded, as was

[31] *Cod. Theod.* 13.3.8: *Exceptis portus xysti virginumque vestalium quot regiones urbis sunt, totidem constituantur archiatri. Etc.* The shorter version in *Cod. Iust.* 10.53.9 does not contain these exceptions, which were anachronistic at the time of this codification. Roueché 1993: 56 has convincingly argued against older interpretations of this law as proof for the decline of the association.

[32] IGUR I 246, B 6: τὰ δαπανηθέντα εἵς τε τὰς εἰκόνας καὶ τὰ πλάσματα καὶ τοὺς στηθιαίους ἀνδριάντας τοὺς λιθίνους.

customary at the time, the permission of the senate and the emperors. The same happened about ten years later for the statue of John of Smyrna.[33]

The statue of John was the last imperial grant for the association. In the second half of the fourth century, the synod experienced a gradual decline, as will be argued in Chapter 11. A possible sign of this decline is that a portico, which according to Rausa was previously used by the athletes, was occupied by the clerks of the urban prefecture in the late fourth century.[34] By 400, the xystic synod was no longer a powerful lobby organization. The building housing the headquarters, which had been granted to the athletes more than 250 years earlier, was donated to the Church by Theodosius II in the 420s. A verse inscription celebrates its consecration – ironically by Pope Xystus (Sixtus) III – as a church of St. Peter and St. Paul, shortly after the Council of Ephesus in 431:[35] "Yield, former name, to one that is new, yield, what is past." The priest Philip is described as bringing a victory palm from Ephesus, a typical agonistic metaphor. The loss of the headquarters must have been a final blow for Greek athletics. Without a strong association, the organization of an international athletic circuit was no longer possible.

Athletic images from the fourth century

Some of the most famous athletic mosaics were laid out in Italy in the fourth century AD. The villa of Piazza Armerina (Sicily), built around 310–330 and with an exceptionally large number of high-quality mosaic floors, is an

[33] CIL VI 10154 (367–375): *D(omini) et Principes n(ostri) Valentinian(us) Valens et Gratianus semper Aug (usti) Filumenum . . . locatione statuae in acletarum curia aeternitatis gloria dignum esse iudicarunt, quod omnes xystici gratanter acceperunt. Sen(atus) pariter simulq(ue) P(opulus) R(omanus) ingenti fabore prosecutus est*. CIL VI 10153 = IGUR I 245 (384–392): *exegit praecepto invictissimorum principum d(ominorum) n(ostrorum) Fl(aviorum) Valentiniani, Theodosii et Arcadii*. For full text and translation see p. 86.

[34] Rausa 2004: 542, 550–51.

[35] Lansford 2009: 104–05 (a corrected version of ILCV 974): *cede prius nomen novitati cede vetustas/ regia laetanter vota dicare libet/ haec petri paulique simul nunc nomine signo/ xystus apostolicae sedis honore fruens/ unum quaeso pares unum duo sumite munus/ unus honor celebret quos habet una fides/ presbyteri tamen hic labor est et cura philippi/ postquam ephesi χρs vicit utrique polo/ praemia discipulus meruit vincente magistro/ hanc palmam fidei rettulit inde senex*. Translated by Lansford as "Yield, former name, to one that is new, yield, what is past: it is pleasing to dedicate a royal offering in joy. I, Xystus, who enjoy the honor of the Apostolic See, now seal it in the name of Peter and Paul together. As equals, I beg, do you both accept this single gift: may a single honor celebrate those whom a single faith embraces. This achievement and its custody nevertheless belong to the presbyter Philip, after Christ triumphed for East and West at Ephesus. As a pupil, with his master's victory he deserved his reward: an aged man, he brought back thence this trophy of the Faith." For the royal donation see also ILCV 1779. It happened after the marriage of Theodosius I to Eudoxia in 421, but before the council of Ephesus in 431, in which Philip took part as *Apostolorum Ecclesiae presbyter*. Cf. Rausa 2004: 546.

important site for the study of elite life in the early fourth century. Several mosaics in this villa illustrate the interest of the wealthy owners in hunting, horse racing, and also Greek *agones*.[36] A large mosaic in the tepidarium, contemporary to the construction of the villa, depicted several events of an athletic contest in two levels. Unfortunately only small parts are preserved: the legs of an athlete and of a trumpeter and the lower part of the latter's instrument, probably from a scene with a victor ceremony, an armed torch race, and the legs of what seems to be a pentathlete touching the ground after a long jump.[37] These fragments are reminiscent of the contemporary mosaic from Capsa, though the tepidarium was too small to depict as many events.

The floor of an apsidal room on the east side of the villa gives a full depiction of a musical *agon* (Fig. 3).[38] All figures have childlike features, in conformity with neighboring mosaics. In the apse, two women are making crowns from twigs with protruding flowers. This type of crown is also known from athletic mosaics, such as the Capsa mosaic or the athletes in the baths of Caracalla, and from mosaics with circus scenes. Under the apse, one can see a prize-table with two bags of money and two monumental crowns, serving as baskets for the flower crowns and palm branches.[39] This prize-table is very similar to the prize-table for the wrestling competition between Eros and Pan depicted on the floor of a nearby room.[40] According to inscriptions on the money bags of both mosaics they contained 12,500 denarii, which was the normal amount for a *follis* (the money bag as monetary unit) about 330–340, when the mosaics were laid out.[41]

Below the prize-table, the musical contest is depicted on three levels. Not all the scenes can be identified with certainty, as not all of them have parallels in the only other full depiction of an artistic *agon* on a mosaic from Patras.[42] This earlier mosaic, assigned to the late second or early third

[36] E.g. Wilson 1983: 34–39.

[37] Bohne 2011: K26b; Carandini, Ricci, and de Vos 1982: 362–66 and fos. LXII–LXIII.

[38] Carandini, Ricci, and de Vos 1982: 285–91 and fo. XLII. The suggestion, on the basis of the upper scene, that this mosaic represents Roman spring festivities such as the *Rosalia* (Manganaro 1959: 247–48) is not convincing as the prize table and the main part clearly refer to a Greek *agon*. Cf. also Lee 1984: 59; Dunbabin 2010: 317.

[39] Specht 2000 argues that these cylinders were in fact baskets. See, however, Salzmann 1998, who shows that they could also be worn on the head like a crown.

[40] Carandini, Ricci, and de Vos 1982: 272 and fo. XXXIX (not in Bohne).

[41] Khanoussi 1988: 559–60. Cf. Bagnall 1985: 17–18. The number on the bags on the prize-table of Eros and Pan is better legible and preceded by the symbol for denarius.

[42] Bohne 2011: K77 is focused on the athletic part of the Patras mosaic, but gives all the relevant literature. For the musical scene see Papakosta in the catalogue published by the Musikinstrumenten-Museum Berlin 2003: 96–97, with photograph.

Figure 3 Mosaic with a musical *agon* from Piazza Armerina: prize-table and two of the three bands with competitors.

century, shows a contest between poets accompanied by *auloi*-players, a musician playing a large kithara, actors of a comedy, a prize-table, actors of a tragedy, a chorus, and a musician playing a smaller kithara. Not included in this mosaic are mimes or pantomimes, who were included in some *agones* from the late second century on.[43] On the top level of the Piazza Armerina mosaic, one sees on the left a typical victor, wearing a flower crown and carrying a palm branch. The second figure seems to be a musician playing a large psalterion. The third figure is problematic. His posture is consistent with someone declaiming poetry – he wears a toga and gestures – but the odd headwear he is holding up with his left hand may be part of a mask, which given the closed mouth could belong only to a pantomime.[44] On the right of this third performer two musicians are playing the *auloi* and a trumpet. On the middle level, the damaged scene

[43] Webb 2012: 226–38.

[44] For pantomimes, their dress and moves see Webb 2008: 58–71. On the comb depicting the famous pantomime dancer Helladia, one of the musicians may also be playing a psalterion on legs. See the photograph in Webb 2008: 94.

on the left may have depicted a chorus and soloist. The scene on the right is again difficult to interpret: the right man is the only figure on the entire floor to wear a short tunic. In his raised hands, he holds a rope or a whip. Rope dancers (καλοπαῖκται) are a known kind of performers, but never attested on the agonistic circuit.[45] More likely, he represents a stock character from a mime performance. His antagonist on the left wears a longer outfit. He seems to hold his arm up in defense, but the mosaic is too damaged to be sure. On the lowest of the three levels, on the left side only the lower body of two figures can be distinguished. Their long elaborate clothes would be consistent with tragic actors. On the right, one can see a *kithara* player and a judge.[46] In the middle of both lower levels a spiked crown on a low column separates the scenes. Each spike is inscribed with a letter. Instead of identifying the games, the artists simply used the first five letters of the Greek alphabet (i.e. numbers 1 to 5).

The best known of the agonistic mosaics of Piazza Armerina is that of the so-called bikini-girls. Unlike male athletes, girls were never completely naked. As this floor was laid out over an older geometric mosaic, it must postdate the original construction phase of the villa, and has been assigned to the mid to even the late fourth century.[47] Lee has shown that it depicts female athletes competing in the *pentathlon*.[48] On the upper level of the mosaic there are, from left to right, a javelin-thrower (of whom only the legs are preserved), a long jumper with halters, a discus-thrower, and two girls running. On the lower level one can see, from right to left, two girls playing with a ball (instead of wrestling); a girl crowning herself with a flower crown and holding a victory palm, a girl with a parasol-shaped unidentified object, and finally a clothed girl with a palm branch, acting as contest president.

We know for certain that Sicily still had *agones* at the time the villa of Piazza Armerina was constructed. A fourth-century verse inscription found in the odeon of Catania honors the ἀγωνοθέτηρ (*sic*) Zosymianeides Severus.[49] The multiple depictions of *agones* confirm the continuing popularity of both athletic and musical contests in at least the first half of the fourth century. The owner of the villa at Piazza Armerina obviously had a great interest in games and spectacles: besides the agonistic scenes, one finds the circus and hunting repeatedly depicted on the floors. Given

[45] E.g. *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* (SC 124) 32 (4th c.); P.Oxy. 34.2707 (6th c.).
[46] Look for example at the robes of the tragic actors on the ivory diptych of the consular games of 517. Photograph in Webb 2008: 94, nos. 2 and 3.
[47] Bohne 2011: K26a. [48] Lee 1984.
[49] IG XIV 502. Cf. AE 1959: 24 and Wilson 1990: 316, fig. 270.

his particular interest, he no doubt attended or even sponsored real-life games, but it is impossible to identify the games on the mosaics with any historical events. There were certainly no games in the immediate surroundings of the villa, as Piazza Armerina is located in the middle of Sicily, far away from the coasts and main cities. The use of consecutive letters (i.e. numbers) on the crowns in the musical contest, where the name of a contest could be expected, indicates, moreover, a generic image of a contest. The historical reality of the competing bikini-girls is particularly hard to evaluate. Under the Roman Empire, several *agones* (e.g. the *Isthmia*, the *Nemea*, and the *Sebasteia*) introduced a competition for girls, but as we have seen (cf. pp. 102–103), their importance should not be exaggerated: it was merely a hobby for rich girls. It would be dangerous to take this mosaic as evidence that such contests for girls were still held in the second half of the fourth century. While this certainly cannot be ruled out, it is equally possible that we are seeing only an artistic fantasy inspired by the *agones* for men, comparable to the occasional replacement of circus performers by *erotes*.

In Aquileia there is another set of mosaics that can be dated to the fourth century on a sound archaeological basis. In the so-called great baths, two large rooms on the north and south ends of the same courtyard are covered with mosaics showing frames with mostly agonistic themes, and occasional mythological scenes, within geometrical fields.[50] The discovery of a coin of Constantine II, minted in 348–350, in the cement in which the northern mosaic was embedded suggests they were laid out in the 350s. In the northern room substantial parts of the floor (34 × 19.5 m) have been preserved. The athletes are not shown in action as at Piazza Armerina, but busts and full-figure single athletes, typically with *cirrus*, are portrayed in separate squares and rectangles. One bust depicts an *agonothetes*: an older man wearing a cloak and a crown with three small busts. Other agonistic fields show prizes, the most interesting of which is a schematic monumental crown reading ΟΛ[Υ]ΜΠΕΙΑ. This does not prove, however, that Aquileia had its own Olympic games attracting Greek athletes in late antiquity.[51] '*Olympia*' is the most generic of contest names. As athletics was a popular theme for the decoration of baths across the Empire, a

[50] Bohne 2011: Ki. A first part of the building was excavated by Brusin about 1920 (see Brusin 1922, 1923, Bertacchi 1988), other parts of the same complex, to the south of the first excavations, were unearthed by Bertacchi in 1961 (Bertacchi 1981). Photographs in Menis 1975: figs. 4–7, Bertacchi 1981, Newby 2005: 65–66. For a short history of the complex on the basis of the latest excavations see Rubinich 2011: 2.

[51] Although Bertacchi 1988: 237 did interpret it as evidence for games.

certain skepticism regarding the reality of games in Aquileia is warranted as long as there is no other evidence for contests in northern Italy. Of the full-figure fields, four show a trumpeter, a herald, a javelin-thrower, and a victor with palm leaf; a stylistically different fifth figure, with an unidentified object at his feet (presumably an inadequate rendering of a prize) and his left arm raised, represents a later phase of repair. This phase is to be dated between the late fourth century and the loss of the thermal function of the complex in the sixth century, and offers particularly interesting evidence for the changing attitudes towards nudity in this period: the repairer added a loincloth.

The southern room, which mirrors the size and layout of the northern room, is less well preserved, but the discovery of three athletic busts shows that it was decorated in a very similar way. The central parts of the floor showed *venationes* scenes. Given the similarity with the northern mosaic, regarding layout as well as style, this mosaic can also be dated in the 350s. Within the same excavation area, slightly south of the northern room, the excavators found further agonistic mosaic fragments, showing the upper body of a victor wearing a crown with five flowers – as in the musical contest mosaic from Piazza Armerina – and typical gymnasium objects such as a strigilis and halters. They may be contemporary as well, but the spatial context of these fragments remains unclear. In a village next to Aquileia was found a mosaic consisting of twelve medallions – not all preserved – containing agonistic crowns alternating with athletic busts.[52] On the best-preserved crowns, one can read ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΑ and ΑΕΓ[ ], probably referring to the origin of the depicted athletes, namely Macedonia and Egypt.

Certainly postdating 348, the mosaics from the great baths in Aquileia are the latest datable athletic images in the Mediterranean. They are also the only securely dated examples of the type of agonistic mosaics that depict athletes in separate frames, reminiscent of honorary monuments rather than illustrations of athletic activities. This affects the date of the most famous athletic mosaics of all: the framed athletes from the baths of Caracalla.[53]

These famous athletic mosaics were discovered during early nineteenth-century excavations in two 24-m-wide *exedrae* of the baths of Caracalla in Rome, the largest thermal complex of the ancient world. In these two large pieces, rectangular fields of 2.16 × 1.02 m alternated with squares of 0.92 × 1.02 m. The rectangles depicted full-figure athletes with sporting

[52] Bohne 2011: K61. [53] Bohne 2011: K56a–b.

paraphernalia such as a discus or boxing gloves, and/or with victory symbols, and occasionally contest officials. The squares depicted busts of athletes. Of the occasional names added to these figures, only two are still legible: the victor Iovinus Alumnus and the official Iobianus, who unfortunately cannot be identified with athletes or officials known from other sources. Proposed dates for these two mosaics range from the original Severan construction phase of the baths and over each of the subsequent renovation phases (under Aurelian, Diocletian, and Constantine), all on the basis of stylistic arguments weakened by the extensive modern restorations.

The mosaics represent one of the earliest examples of the iconographic fashion of framing individual athletes rather than depicting them in action. Unlike in the Aquileia pieces, the frames are still very thin and not surrounded by geometrical motifs, so that there are far more athletes on each floor. That the mosaics suggest an early stage of what became a typical, fourth-century iconography speaks against a Severan date and favors proposals for a later one. Whether an early fourth-century origin should be preferred over a late third-century one remains unclear, however.

A very similar alternation between squares with busts and rectangles with full-figured athletes (more than life size) can be found on a mosaic in the baths of Helena, also in Rome. Although an early fourth-century date is likely, sound archaeological grounds are lacking in this case too for connecting the design of the mosaic with the restoration by the empress Helena in the period around 320. Also similar, though more simply executed, is another Roman mosaic found during late nineteenth-century construction works in the Via Nazionale. It has the same kind of frames, but is in black and white and has undetailed full-sized figures fitted into squares rather than rectangles.[54]

The last Italian mosaic with framed athletes comes from the small baths of Musiciolus in Ostia.[55] The mosaic in the caldarium shows four busts of athletes and one of an official. All are named: the official is called Musiciolus – after whom the baths are named – and the athletes are called Ursus, Luxsurius, Faustus, and Pascentius: the first two were certainly nicknames, while the latter two could be nicknames or real names. The frames are more prominent than in the Roman examples, pointing to a

[54] Bohne 2011: K51 and K55.
[55] Bohne 2011: K23. A clear photograph is available on http://www.ostia-antica.org/regio4/15/15-2.htm.

fourth-century rather than a late third-century date, and the figures look more like the busts from Aquileia than those from Rome.

Athletic contests in the fourth to the early fifth century

The contests in Campania and Rome remained popular at least until the mid fourth century. For the two *agones* in Campania the evidence is limited, however. An inscription from Naples with the *agonothetes* Cominius Priscianus has been dated tentatively to the fourth century on the basis of his other functions.[56] The fourth-century topography of Puteoli is depicted on eight glass flasks. On several of these, one can recognize the stadium and on one also a palaistra.[57]

The Roman contests were presumably all held in the stadium of Domitian, which was constructed in 92–96 and renovated by Alexander Severus in 228. Two brick-stamps attest repairs during and after the reign of Diocletian.[58] In a passage relating to AD 357, Ammianus Marcellinus still considered the stadium and the odeon two of Rome's most important buildings.[59] It is not clear when the stadium stopped being used for its original purpose. The structure itself continued to exist in the Middle Ages, with shops under the arcades. The original function was preserved in the name: the medieval name *Campus Agonis* is attested,[60] the seventeenth-century church is called *Sant'Agnese in Agone*, the contemporary name *Piazza Navona* is derived from *Piazza in Agone*, and a street leading to the piazza is today still called *Corsia Agonale*.

For each of the three permanent contests in Rome there is fourth-century evidence. The *agones* for Athena Promachos and for Sol are both mentioned in the incomplete Greek inscription on a donation to the xystic synod about 313.[61] The 'Chronography of 354' contains a list of Roman rulers with short comments, mentioning the institution of the *agon Minervae* (i.e. for Athena) by Gordian III and the *agon Solis* by Aurelian. That this struck the chronicler, who compiled this list in the 330s, as significant suggests that both games were still celebrated at the time.[62] For the *agon Solis* this is further confirmed by an oration of emperor Julian,

[56] CIL X 1487. Cf. PIR II² C 1269: *fortasse quarto demum saeculo*.
[57] Ostrow 1979: 78–82, 94–95, 121–22. The stadium appears on the Prague flask (with inscription STADIV), on the Pilkington flask (with inscription STADI), and perhaps on the Odemira flask. The palaistra (PALES) appears only on the Prague flask.
[58] Colini 1943: 86. [59] Ammianus Marcellinus 16.10.14. [60] Colini 1943: 24.
[61] IGUR I 246 l. A 16–17.
[62] The list ends with Licinius (ed. Mommsen 1892: 147–48). Cf. Salzman 1990: 50–56.

from the 350s or 360s, in which the games for Helios (*Sol*) are described as a relatively recent tradition (i.e. in comparison to other religious festivities).[63] By that time, the contest not only coincided more or less with the waning winter *Nemea*, but it also fell on the exact same day as the upcoming Christmas celebration.[64]

The *Kapitolia* too continued at least until the mid fourth century. Ausonius wrote how Attius Tiro Delphidius, a professor from Bordeaux, won an 'Olympian' garland as a boy with a poem for Jupiter.[65] Assuming he wrote in Latin, the *Kapitolia* are the only real option considering the link with Jupiter. Caldelli tentatively dates his victory to 338 or 342.[66] Two colored glass plates depict, moreover, the coronation of a Capitolian victor. One comes from the fourth-century cemetery of Saint Agnes in Rome. A young man, naked but with his legs and left arm covered by draperies, is holding a horn of plenty and is accompanied by a woman sitting beside him and by a young girl and two cupids with fruit, grain, and flowers. A third cupid holds a cylindrical crown with the inscription ΚΑΠΕΘ over the young man's head, identifying him as a victor of the *Kapitolia*. Above this image is written *[. . .]ris vivas valeas vincas*.[67] The iconography of the second plate, likewise from the fourth century, is more clearly agonistic. A man in a long tunic, with *auloi* in his left hand and a palm branch in his right, stands between two short columns (Fig. 4). The left column is surmounted by five cylindrical crowns on top of each other, and the right column by a mask. Caldelli interprets this as an iconographic synthesis of agonistic elements portraying the victory ceremony. The right column has a relief with two crowns, each with the name of a contest written above it: a cylindrical crown for the CAPITOLIA and a thinner crown – like the twig crowns with flowers from Piazza Armerina – for the ILIA.[68] *Ilia* is the Latin spelling of Ἡλίεια – double iotacism and loss

[63] Julian, *Or.* 11.42 (no. Budé).

[64] The *depositio Martyrum*, drawn up in 336, and included in the Chronography of 354, gives a select list of dates which were at the time celebrated as Christian feasts in Rome, including December 25 as the birthday of Jesus. How popular this feast was at this date is not clear. For the date of the *agon Solis* see n. 22 above.

[65] Ausonius, *Commemoratio Professorum Burdigalensium* 5.6–7. Less likely is the *agon [. . . I]obiani*, attested in the 160s in Massalia (CIL XII 410). See Caldelli 1997: 398–400.

[66] Caldelli 1993a: 155.

[67] CIL XV 7045. See Caldelli 1993a: 72. It has been suggested that this glass is a fake, but the detailed depiction of the agonistic crown, with a spelling error (θ instead of τ), pleads against this (cf. CIL). This does not prove the authenticity of another glass with a strikingly similar scene – with the third cupid holding a vase rather than a cylindrical crown – which might indeed be a modern copy. Cf. Pillinger 1984: 49 n. 374, ill. 121–22.

[68] CIL XV 7015. Caldelli 1993b.

Figure 4 Drawing of a victory scene on a colored glass plate from Rome (fourth century; Vatican Museum).

of aspiration in *Koine* – and therefore the Greek name of the *agon Solis*. This name is also attested in an inscription from about the same period, written inside a rather crude drawing of a column: '*Marciane vincas*' and '*Ilia*' in a crown.[69] Interestingly, one of the fourth-century victors on the bronze plate of Olympia is also called Marcianus, but there is no way of determining whether these two men were identical.[70]

On the basis of this evidence, it can be concluded that all three contests continued until the reign of Constantine and at least two of them, the *agon Solis* and the *Kapitolia*, for several decades after that. The *agones* may well have continued until the end of the century, however, or even into the fifth. Athletes were definitely still present in Rome. A contorniate from the second half of the fourth century shows a pair of wrestlers in action. The standing victor Filinus figures on several contorniates from the end of the century. He is accompanied by a trumpeter announcing his victory, a traditional agonistic image.[71] In 399, Claudian wrote a panegyric on the new consul. In that year, no *agones* would normally take place. At the end of this speech, he asked the muses to go and fetch entertainers (horses,

[69] CIL VI 10150 = 33962. The stone was found near the baths of Diocletian. CIL and Caldelli 1993b: 403 read *Elia*, but the picture included by Caldelli does not show any horizontal bars. *Ilia* is, moreover, more logical given the itacistic pronunciation of η.

[70] Ebert 1997: 223.

[71] Alföldi and Alföldi 1976: cat. nos. 63, 489 (wrestling pair), and 221, 350, 352, 354 (Filinus).

athletes, *venatores*, actors, and acrobats) to celebrate this appointment. This is a reference to the consular games, which were the most important spectacles of the year in Rome.[72] Claudian suggests that top athletes, namely the victors of the Isthmian and Olympic games, should be invited.[73] This may suggest that international champions gave demonstrations in Rome about 400 in the context of consular games, or may just be a poetic description of matches with less illustrious athletes.

Two more contorniates with champion athletes date from the reign of Theodosius II (402–450) and Valentinian III (425–455), who are portrayed on the obverse. Both show a victor, and the legends read IOHANNES NICAS and ΘΕΩΦΙΛΕ NIKA. It is unlikely that the first one was identical to the John who received a statue at the association's thirty to forty years before. The traditional images of a nude victor, and in particular the Greek inscription and sortition urn on the Theophilos contorniate, suggest that they should be interpreted in a traditional agonistic context. The survival of an *agon* until at least the late 420s is consistent with the long history of the athletic synod. That synod and *agon* ended together is likely, though not necessary, as the *agon* may have continued into the 430s or 440s.[74]

Late-antique athletics outside the agonistic circuit

The end of the agonistic circuit did not put an end to all athletic competitions. Demonstration matches with athletes were already organized for the entertainment of the Roman people before the Greek *agones* were introduced, continued in the shadow of the great *agones* until late antiquity, and survived them. Because these matches did not enjoy the same prestige as the *agones*, they are more difficult to track in the sources, however. One contorniate (later fourth or fifth century) may depict such an athlete who provided extra entertainment in the circus: it depicts a man in a loincloth running past a column.[75]

Ammianus Marcellinus recounts how in 369 the wrestler Asbolius was accused of attempted poisoning and was killed for this by heavy blows with a lead object.[76] His bad reputation and the occupations of his companions,

[72] Cameron 1970: 32. [73] Claudian, *Panegyricus de Consulatu Flavii Manlii Theodori* 288–290.
[74] Alföldi and Alföldi 1976: cat. nos. 458, 464 (Iohannes), and 463 (Theophilos). On athletic contorniates in general see Alföldi and Alföldi 1976: 213 and 1990: 215–22; Lehmann 2013: 198–200, 229–31. Regarding the other examples: cat. nos. 577, 595 are hard to date, 477, 569, 573, 577, 595, 660 are uncertain identifications.
[75] Alföldi and Alföldi 1976: cat. no. 569. [76] Ammianus Marcellinus 28.1.8; 28.1.29.

a maker of musical instruments and a soothsayer, suggest that Asbolius did not belong to the respectable and well-off athletes who visited Rome once every four years for the games, but was probably a different kind of entertainer.[77] The name Asbolius, literally 'sooty', is a few times attested as proper name in late antiquity, but also as the stage name of an actor and two gladiators.[78] This was no doubt how Asbolius the wrestler used it. It could be a reference to his skin color, to the color of the dust or ashes he sprinkled on his oiled body, or to the centaur Asbolos.

As the fate of such athlete performers was not connected to that of the *agones*, they survived the athletic circuit. In 523, Cassiodorus wrote in the name of the Ostrogoth king Theodoric the Great to the Roman consul Maximus. In his letter, he criticized *venationes*, but argued that it was nevertheless the duty of the consul to procure and pay for spectacles. In passing, he mentioned some other performers hired by the consul: musicians and singers and "those who wrestle with anointed and flexible bodies." The Colosseum he calls "a fit place for runners."[79] Both remarks clearly illustrate that athletic matches were still organized as an event at Roman-style spectacles as late as the sixth century.

A bronze, probably sixth-century, vessel of Italian origin, the so-called Kovacs vase, gives us unique depictions of the triumphs of a circus athlete (Figs. 5a–c).[80] The inscriptions on the neck "Invincible Rome!" and "The Green (performer)!"[81] connect the scenes below to the Roman circus factions. On the first scene one athlete holds the other in a wrestling grip. The loser is ironically called "Victorinus" and the one who has the upper hand is identified as the underdog with the unassuming diminutive "Privatulus." In the second scene (Fig. 5c) he is throwing his opponent, while a third athlete triumphantly puts his foot on his opponent who lies on the ground. "He who did it to himself shouldn't cry" (*qui sibi fecit non ploret*) is inscribed as comment. In the next scene (Fig. 5a) Privatulus boxes his opponent, who is shielding his face, and calls him "Sissy!" (*cinede*). More comments are written with the scene, all in hard-to-interpret vulgar Latin. On the ground is a money bag with the number XXV. On the last

[77] Dickie 2001: 299. [78] Robert 1963: 211–13; Bowersock 2004: 765.

[79] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 5.42.1: *qui peruncta corporum flexibilitate luctantur*; 5: *ut et correntibus aptum daretur spatium*.

[80] Klose and Klein 2013.

[81] The inscription reads INVICTA ROMA PRASINE. Klose and Klein 2013: 144 interpret this as a nominative with dative *praesinae (factio)*. Because the function of the dative remains unclear, I take it as two exclamations in the vocative.

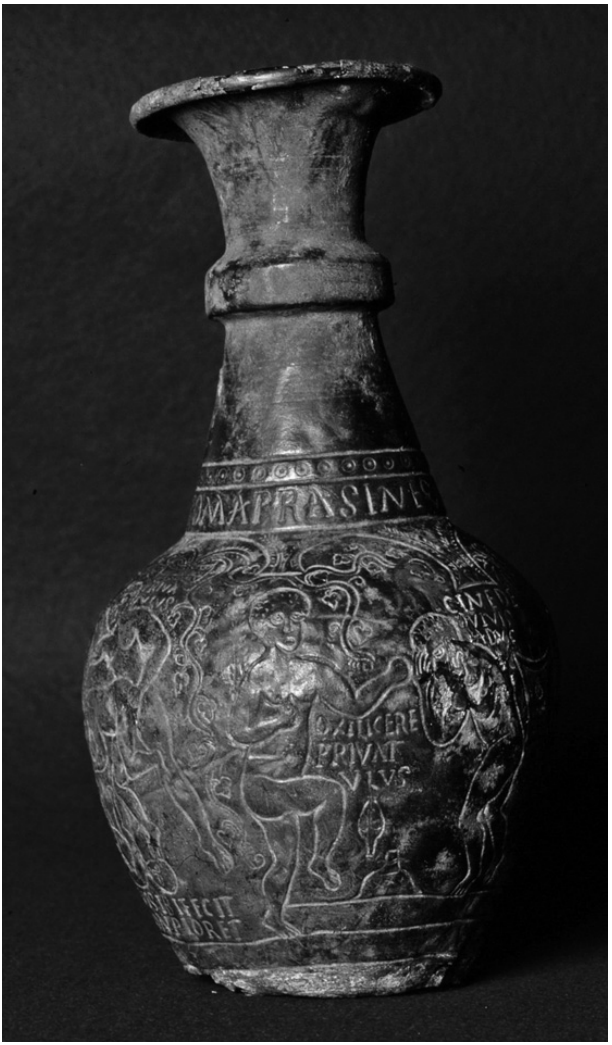


Figure 5a The bronze Kovacs vase with scenes of circus athletes (sixth century).

scene, he kicks his opponent in the face. Although there are obvious similarities to earlier depictions of athletes (the nudity, the money bag, the victors identified with palm branch or crown, the manner of indicating defeat with the index finger, an umpire) the atmosphere is far more rough. The loser is humiliated not only with words, but also iconographically: he is shown trodden on, thrown like a sack of flour, kicked in the face, and

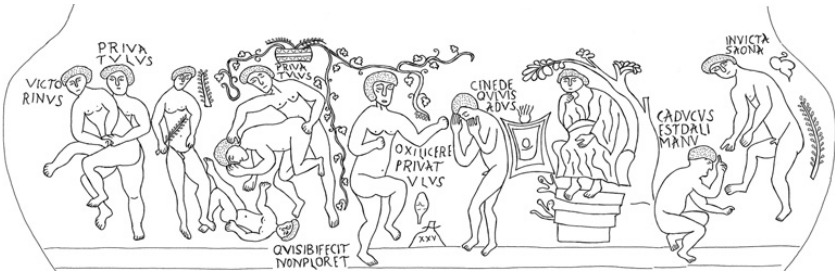


Figure 5b Drawing of all athletic scenes on the Kovacs vase.

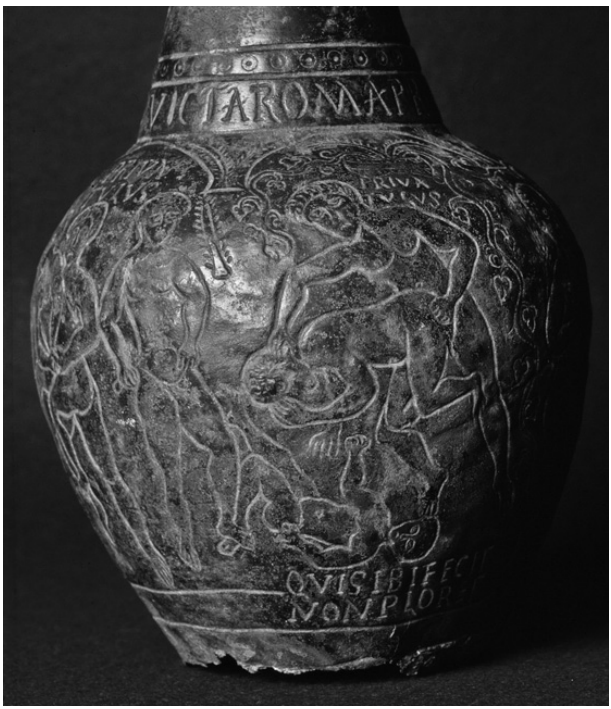


Figure 5c Two pairs of circus athletes (sixth century).

shrinking with fear, all motifs that do not appear in depictions of traditional *agones*. As will be discussed further in Chapter 13, this new iconography suggests that the inclusion in the circus had a profound effect on the evolution of athletics in late antiquity.

CHAPTER 6

Gaul

The agonistic tradition

Southern Gaul was never devoid of Greek influence after the foundation of Massalia in the sixth century BC, but it is not known in how far this influence also involved athletics. There are no victories known of athletes from Gaul at any of the major games. A bronze plate on a lead urn, which records that Kleudemos won the ephebic contest and was twice gymnasiarch in Massalia, does show that at the latest by the first century BC gymnasium culture had found its way here.[1] The earliest known athletic wall-paintings, found about 40 km east of Nemausus, date from roughly the same period.[2]

From the late first century AD on, the elite of Gallia Narbonensis wanted to join the international agonistic circuit. A notable from Vienne (about 30 km south of Lyon) made arrangements in his will for the organization of an athletic *agon*. The duumvir Trebonius Rufinus abolished this contest ca. 100, on the grounds that it corrupted the morals of the city. The citizens of Vienne complained that he had no authority to do so and took it up with the emperor, but his more conservative councilors advised Trajan to confirm Trebonius' decision.[3] Besides being an illustration of the traditional Roman disdain for Greek contests, this anecdote equally shows that in this Gallic city, which was not even a Greek foundation, Greek athletics was supported by some members of the elite, who took initiatives for establishing a contest. A continued interest in athletics a century later is obvious from a large mosaic and from wall-paintings in the local baths, both depicting various Greek sports. Whether or not these decorations illustrate an actual Viennese contest is disputed, but details that are not commonly found in gymnasium scenes or mythological matches, most

[1] IG XIV 2445. [2] Bohne 2011: K114. [3] Pliny, *Ep*. 4.22.

importantly the *pentathlon*, but also a trumpeter and a victor holding a palm leaf, indeed seem to support such an identification.[4]

The Viennese interest in athletics was shared by notables of Massalia and Nemausus, who acted as presidents of the *agones* in their own cities from the second century on. In Nemausus, the local branch of the association of performing artists seems to have been particularly active in this century. The games for artists may even have been included in the international circuit: a victory catalogue at Argos for a Milesian actor mentions victories at quadrennial games in Massalia. A similar, though incomplete, catalogue has been found in Nemausus. Competitions for athletes do not seem to have attracted international champions, though.[5] It is possible that Arles and Nice also had athletic games.[6]

Gymnasium culture too is archaeologically well attested across Gallia Narbonensis.[7] Several other athletic mosaics from the second century were found in this province, but unlike the one from Vienne, most depict mythological matches rather than realistic contests, usually between Dares and Entellus or between Herakles and Antaios.[8] In the rest of Gaul there were certainly no athletic contests.[9] Further away from cosmopolitan Rome and less influenced by Greek culture, the elite of northern Gaul probably never even considered the idea of introducing *agones*. Even if they did, these games would have been too insignificant and/or too far from the normal circuit to attract international competitors. This does not mean that the population of Gaul was completely unaware of Greek athletics. Athletic-themed art and exercises in the baths spread more widely than actual games, to northern Gaul and the Iberian Peninsula, especially from the third century on. A mosaic with boxers from Massongex in Switzerland dates from the first century, but here loincloths clearly put the athletes outside of the Greek agonistic tradition. This is also the case for the boxers depicted on first-century lamps from Spain, which equally had a

[4] Caldelli 1997: 445–54. Bohne 2011: K115 and K117–18.

[5] Caldelli 1997: 395–410 (Massalia), 411–44 (Nemausus). The victory catalogues are here nos. M3 (IAG 74) and N13 (IG XIV 2499). For the local branch of the association in Nemausus see also Ghiron-Bistagne 1992: 225–31.

[6] In Arles, a benefactor donated a large cash fund, the interest of which was to be used either for athletics or for circus games; cf. CIL XII 670. CIL V 7914 mentions an *agonothetes* in Nice.

[7] See Thuillier 1996: 114, Caldelli 1997: 455–56, Bouet 1998: 33–106, and Decker and Thuillier 2004: 164–68.

[8] Bohne 2011: K109–13, K119.

[9] The contest in Greek and Latin oratory organized by Caligula at Lugdunum should not be identified as a Greek *agon*, as it is in Harris 1972: 60 and Caldelli 1997: 457. Suetonius, *Caligula* 20 implies that it was a one-off and combined with other shows. Neither do the references to a pantomime, an odeon, and a slave-boy styled γυμνικός (in Caldelli's n. 2) prove that there was a Greek *agon*.

local tradition of boxing. From the third century, there are depictions of Greek-style athletes from Salzburg (Austria), Kreuzweingarten (Germany, near Bonn), and Herrera (Spain).[10] A funerary inscription for a pankratiast called Cornelius Atticus has been found on Mallorca (Pollentia). This man probably worked at the local gymnasium, as the inscription refers only to training in the palaistra, not to a professional career.

Athletics in late-antique Gaul

Late-antique information on athletics in Gaul is even scarcer than for other regions. As Gallia Narbonensis was never of importance within the agonistic circuit, the local games probably disappeared relatively early. In 360 Julian celebrated the first five years of his reign, the *Quinquennalia*, at Vienne.[11] Ammianus Marcellinus compares the crown that Julian wore on this occasion to the much cheaper crown traditionally worn, in combination with purple garb, by xystarchs. Despite the association between athletics and Gaul, this passage does not mean that Julian celebrated his jubilee with an *agon* and certainly not that Vienne had a regular *agon*. It merely shows that the historiographer had some experience with athletic games, probably acquired by watching them in his home of Antioch.

The modest fashion for athletic scenes in bath buildings, which had spread north and west in the third century, continued in the early fourth. Athletic paintings and mosaics from Balazote, Mérida (Spain), and Estremoz (Portugal) are dated on stylistical grounds to the later third or early fourth centuries.[12] A mosaic with two boxers from Trier belongs, again on a stylistical basis, to the first half of the fourth century.[13] As an imperial residence, and later as capital of the prefecture, Trier was the most important city in early fourth-century Gaul, which stimulated an active

[10] Baths in Lutetia, for example, had a palaistra. See Decker and Thuillier 2004: 166. For the third-century mosaics see Bohne 2011: K106 (Herrara), K122 (Massongex), K123 (Salzburg), K126 (Kreuzweingarten). Ceballos Hornero 2004: 353–74 catalogues athletic inscriptions from Spain and lists all local depictions of athletes – with significantly only boxers on first-century lamps. There are three athletic mosaics from Britain (Bohne 2011: K128–30), but there is no reason to assume athletics spread there: two are clearly mythological – wrestling Erots and the match between Herakles and Antaios – and the third is a bust of a naked man – a common image in later third- or early fourth-century athletic mosaics, but perhaps not recognized as such in Britain.

[11] Ammianus Marcellinus 21.1.4: . . . *quinquennalia Augustus iam edidit et ambitioso diademate utebatur lapidum fulgore distincto, cum inter exordia principatus, assumpta vili corona circumdatus erat xystarchae similis purpurato*.

[12] Bohne 2011: K105–108.

[13] Hoffmann, Hupe, and Goethert 1999: 170–71, no. 163, Taf. 103 on the entire mosaic and Bohne 2011: K127 on the athletic scene, though not on the strangely shaped gloves. She does give a general discussion of this type of gloves: 126–30.

entertainment sector. The mosaic could suggest that the public entertainment also included athletics, but of course does not indicate the existence of an *agon*. Like other mosaics from the same period – e.g. the one at Mérida – it mixes athletics with scenes from other entertainment. The other partially preserved scenes depict *venationes*, so the boxing match can perhaps be identified as a show held at the amphitheater, in place of the increasingly uncommon gladiatorial combat. The naked boxers have oddly shaped boxing gloves with what looks like spikes on the knuckles. However, as it would be difficult to attach metal spikes to boxing gloves in such a way that they could function as knives, it has been suggested – on the basis of other depictions – that Roman boxing gloves were not mitten-shaped, but gloves with separate slots for fingers (one for the little finger, one for the ring and middle fingers, and one for the index finger), and that such spikes are simply inelegantly depicted fingers.[14]

Athletic scenes could probably be seen in baths in southern Gaul until the fifth century. Many of those created in the third or fourth centuries would have been visible until the building was abandoned. In a letter from the 460s, Sidonius Apollinaris, the rich aristocrat from Lugdunum who later became the bishop of Clermont, describes the baths of his country house in Avitacus (Aydat near Clermont-Ferrand): "Here the walls do not tell the ugly story of the nude beauty of painted bodies, which may embellish the art, but dishonors the artist. There are no actors, looking ridiculous with their clothes and expressions . . . There are no oiled and entangled athletes, punching and gripping, whom, even in real-life wrestling matches, if they are entangled indecently, the chaste stick of the gymnasiarchs separates without delay."[15] This passage illustrates that agonistic scenes could still be expected in the mid fifth century and that they could even be imagined to exist in real life. Sidonius may have seen athletes in Rome, where he sojourned on several occasions, or even in southern Gaul. Salvian, who wrote around the same time, in fact also included athletes in a list of spectacles, which he criticized from a Christian perspective.[16] Sidonius' passage suggests, moreover, that these traditions

[14] Lee 1997: esp. 171 studied examples of what was previously interpreted as the Roman *caestus* with metal pieces. He does not mention the Trier mosaic, but discusses on pp. 174–75 the closest parallel of these 'spikes', namely a black-and-white mosaic from Ostia.

[15] Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep*. 2.2.6: *Non hic per nudam pictorum corporum pulchritudinem turpis prostat historia, quae sicut ornat artem, sic devenustat artificem. Absunt ridiculi vestitu et vultibus histriones . . . absunt lubrici tortuosique pugilatu et nexibus palaestritae, quorum etiam viventum luctas, si involvantur obscenius, casta confestim gymnasiarchorum virga dissolvit*.

[16] Salvian, *De gubernatione* (SC 220) 6.15.

conflicted with contemporary Christian mores. His claim that the gymnasiarchs had become a type of moral police should not be taken at face value. Even in the East, gymnasiarchs are no longer attested by the early fifth century. At some baths there may have been an overseeer who could punish training men for indecent behavior – remember the rule of chastity mentioned by Malalas (12.10) – but the archaic title Sidonius gives them is probably just meant to express his erudition. Elsewhere in his work Sidonius likewise refers to Greek athletics to show off his knowledge of classical literature. In a poem to Consentius, written between 462 and 466, he described Consentius as attending circus races and shows by different performers, some of whom practiced wrestling – for which he uses the Greek *pale*. Wrestling is used here in a metaphorical way, however, as it is presented as performed by mimes.[17] Futhermore, he linked the horse races to the ancient races at Elis, although they were in reality organized by the colors and thus were thoroughly Roman.[18]

[17] *Carm.* 23.300–303: *Quid dicam citharistrias, choraulas, / mimos, schoenobatas, gelasianos / cannas, plectra, iocos, palen, rudentem / coram te trepidanter explicare?* "Why should I say that the cithara-players, flute-players, mimes, rope-dancers, and jesters display tremblingly their reeds, plectra, jokes, wrestling, and ropes before your eyes." The performers and their instruments/techniques are presented in a complicated double chiasmus: the reeds are part of the flutes and the plectra used for the cithara; the jokes belong to the jesters and the ropes to the rope-dancers, so the wrestling must refer to the mimes.

[18] *Carm.* 23.313 and 392 (references to Elis and Pisa).

CHAPTER 7

North Africa

The agonistic tradition

Rome annexed the province of Africa after destroying Carthage in 146 BC. Mauretania, the most western part of North Africa, first became a client kingdom, but in AD 44 it became a province as well. From the first century AD on, North African cities gradually started to look more Roman, with temples, theaters, amphitheaters, and baths. With these buildings came Roman spectacles such as theatrical performances, *munera*, and circus games.[1] The influence of Greek culture was only indirect: in good Roman tradition some bathing complexes, such as the Antonine baths of Carthage, had a palaistra, where people may have exercised in the Greek style.[2] There were no athletic contests in the early Empire, however, at least not in the Greek style – Africa did have a local tradition of boxing.[3] From the reign of Commodus on, this changed: Africa now organized its own *agones* and athletic pursuits in the baths became more popular.[4]

The provincial capitals of Mauretania Caesariensis and Africa Proconsularis each got two *agones*. An Ostian inscription, probably from the third quarter of the third century, records *Kommodeia* and *Severeia* in Caesarea, and *Pythia* and *Asklepeia* in Carthage.[5] The games in Caesarea were, as is evident from their names, founded in the late second century. An epitaph for the twenty-five-year old Lygdamos, found in the same city, commemorates a *pankration* victory, which he probably won at one of

[1] Hugoniot 2005. Amphitheaters are usually earlier than circuses. See Dunbabin 1978: 66 for a late first-century mosaic with gladiators from a villa at Zliten. For the circuses see Humphrey 1986: 295–336.
[2] Heinz 1983: 103–04. Floor plan in Brödner 1983: 247.
[3] Suetonius, *Caligula* 18.1: boxers recruited from Africa and Campania to perform in Roman *munera*.
[4] Overviews in Robert 1982, Khanoussi 1991a, and Hugoniot 1998: 661–91.
[5] CIL XIV 474 = ILS 5233. For the date: the inscription also mentions the *Aktia* of Bostra, which were instituted in the reign of Philip the Arab (Wallner 2000: 103).

these contests.[6] The *Pythia* of Carthage are further attested in an inscription from Perinthos, from the early to mid third century, and in the *Scorpiace* of Tertullian, written about 203.[7] The imperial permission must have been awarded shortly before that date, as according to Tertullian the city was at the time still receiving envoys from other cities congratulating Carthage for having been granted games. According to Tertullian this happened "after the old age of the stadium." He of course does not refer to the decay of a monumental building: stadia were never constructed in Africa as the existing amphitheaters, circuses, and theaters already offered a suitable infrastructure. Instead, the author's remark bears on the long tradition of Greek games elsewhere before Carthage finally got such a contest. Robert has convincingly argued that the agonistic images of the visions of Perpetua, likewise in 203, refer to the *Pythia* as well.[8] Since Tertullian's treatment of the *Pythia* suggests that these came first, the *Asklepeia* must have been introduced at some point between the introduction of the *Pythia* circa 200 and the Ostia inscription of circa 260. Asklepios was a popular god in Carthage at the time.[9] An inscription from Ephesus, mentioning a Carthaginian delegation at Ephesian games in 211, illustrates how Carthage became quickly embedded in the international agonistic circuit.[10]

There is no good evidence for Greek *agones* outside the provincial capitals.[11] It is possible that there was an *agon* in Neapolis (Nabeul), where a monumental prize crown with the inscription ARTEMONIS is depicted on a mosaic.[12] This genitive could refer to an '*agon* of Artemon', who would then be the founder of local games, but there are no other

[6] CIL VIII 21441.

[7] IGR I 802. Photograph in Robert 1978: 468. Tertullian, *Scorpiace* (CC SL 2) 6.2–5: *Agonas istos, contentiosa sollemnia et superstitiosa certamina Graecorum et religionum et voluptatum, quanta gratia saeculum celebret iam et Africae licuit. Adhuc Carthaginem singulae civitates gratulando inquietant donatam Pythico agone post stadii senectutem*. Cf. Robert 1982: 234.

[8] Robert 1982: 253–76. The critique of Aronen 1989 that Perpetua died before the *Pythia* were instituted and that agonistic images were normal in Christian literature is not convincing as he ignores Robert's strongest arguments: (1) grants of games were initiated by cities and the first *Pythia* therefore do not have to be linked to the imperial visit of 203; (2) Perpetua not only received a crown – a common image indeed – but also golden apples, a prize typical of *Pythia*. Aronen overestimates, moreover, the knowledge of Greek sport in a city where it was such a recent fashion.

[9] Robert 1982: 231. Cf. Benseddik 2005.

[10] IK Ephesos 2053.

[11] Khanoussi 1991a: 315 assumes that also Utica had "un grand concours agonistique grec," on the basis of Robert 1978: 468 n. 41, a long footnote which is a kind of preview of Robert 1982 and which fleetingly mentions an unpublished inscription from Utica about an athlete from Abonouteichos in Paphlagonia. In the actual 1982 article, Robert nowhere mentions this inscription. Apparently, it was not a reliable source for African athletics after all. Perhaps the earlier identification of the man as an athlete was incorrect? Certainly, this is not enough to prove that there was an *agon* in Utica.

[12] Dunbabin 2010: 315, 335 (photograph).

athletic elements in this mosaic to confirm that the image fits in an agonistic context. Khanoussi has argued on the basis of two inscriptions recording a donation of money for a traditional boxing spectacle and a *gymnasium* that athletic contests were regularly held in small African towns, but this interpretation has not found acceptance.[13] 'Gymnasium' would indeed be an odd word for a competition with professional athletes. *Gymnasia* are in fact often attested in Africa as gifts unrelated to games. The third-century will of C. Cornelius Egrilianus from Theveste, for example, provided for *gymnasia* on sixty-four days of the year. Therefore, Hugoniot returned to the older interpretation that these are donations of oil for the baths.[14]

In such baths, athletic exercises did grow more popular everywhere in Africa Proconsularis. In Leptis Magna, for example, a large palaistra was added to the Hadrianic baths in the reign of Commodus and smaller towns received bathing complexes with a palaistra in the third century.[15] The fashion for athletics is reflected in decorations of floors and walls, as for example the mosaic and painted frieze in the private baths in Silin near Leptis Magna.[16] A bas-relief from Mactaris, from the early third century, depicts two wrestling matches and a victor with a crown.[17] Greek athletics was mainly popular among the upper classes, that is among young men with free time to train and among notables wanting to show off their cultivated tastes by donating oil, sponsoring *agones*, and commissioning athletic-themed mosaics. Athletics was a means to express philhellenism, which was fashionable among Roman and romanized elites. Tertullian used this notion that acting Greek was fashionable, saying that the Carthaginian ruling class wallowed in the dust in the palaistra and got themselves Greek haircuts, to defend himself against the reproach that he wore a Greek mantle instead of a Roman toga.[18]

The emerging interest in athletics in Africa Proconsularis is connected to its great prosperity and improving political position in the late second century. Especially in the reign of Septimius Severus many cities attained

[13] Khanoussi 1991a: 316: CIL VIII 12421 (mid 3rd c. – Goritana Civitas – annual *pugilibus et gymnasio*), 12425 (239 – Ziqua – one *spectaculum pugilum et gymnasium*).
[14] Will in ILAlg I 3040 and 3041. Discussion of the latter inscription in Snyder 1940: 297–317. Hugoniot 2005: 254.
[15] For Leptis Magna see Floriani Squarciapino 1966: 89–94. Furthermore e.g. the palaistra of the Petronii at Thuburbo Maius, probably from 225 (ILAfr 271, Brödner 1983: 206), the large baths of Lambaesis, the late second-century baths of Thamugadi and the baths of Licinius at Thugga from circa 260 (Heinz 1983: 105–06, 110).
[16] Bohne 2011: K88a and b. [17] Picard 1982. [18] Tertullian, *De Pallio* (SC 513) 4.1.

municipal and colonial status, and Carthage, Utica, and Leptis Magna were even granted the *ius italicum*.[19] It was probably the comparison with provincial capitals elsewhere that stimulated Carthage and Caesarea to ask for sacred Greek games, which were alien to African as well as to Roman culture, but which had, first in the East and since the late first century in some parts of the West, become an essential part of civic culture.

Although Caesarea had its *agones*, there is no evidence for the spread of gymnasium culture in the less densely populated province of Mauretania.[20] Whereas Africa Proconsularis could profit from its vicinity to Italy and Sicily, Mauretania was further away from the normal agonistic circuit and, moreover, less rich. Therefore, it was harder to attract professional trainers for the local youth and international champions for the *agones*, whose presence might have stimulated the general popularity of athletics.

In both Africa Proconsularis and Mauretania, Greek athletics stood in the shadow of other games. The introduction of *agones* coincided with an increase of Roman-style games. *Venationes* were the most common shows, as is evident from the frequent depictions in mosaics, sometimes commemorating particular *munera*, and from the spread of amphitheaters.[21] The traditional boxing contests continued to be popular as well. They were held at municipal festivals, sometimes in combination with other spectacles.[22] The upsurge of spectacles led to a first vehement Christian critique. The reference to the *Pythia* in Tertullian's *Scorpiace* came up in a criticism of cities organizing athletic contests. In his *De spectaculis* of about AD 200, Tertullian discussed more systematically how horse racing, theatrical shows, Greek *agones*, and spectacles in the amphitheater were connected to pagan religion and therefore intrinsically bad. In general, Tertullian is more succinct about athletic contests than about other spectacles, though no less opposed to them, presumably because he was less well acquainted with them.[23]

[19] Gascou 1972: 167–98 ; Le Bohec 2005: 75–80.

[20] There is fragmentary mosaic with athletes from Caesarea (Bohne 2011: K101).

[21] For the mosaics see Dunbabin 1978: 65–87 or Blanchard-Lemée *e.a.* 1995: 188–97. On the territory of Tunisia alone, already thirty-two amphitheaters have been located. Cf. Le Bohec 2005: 115.

[22] CIL VIII 14855, 24056, 25836. Esp. CIL VIII 11998: *spectaculum pugilum et aurigarum et ludorum scaenicorum edidit*.

[23] It is not clear whether Tertullian wrote *De spectaculis* before or after the introduction of the *Pythia*. That *agones* are included suggests that he did it afterwards, but the absence of any reference to *Pythia*, while he mentions *Olympia, Kapitolia, Nemea*, and *Isthmia*, suggest he did it before, though given his preference for antiquarian information that is hardly conclusive. In any case these two events cannot have been more than a few years apart.

Figure 6 Mosaic with athletic *agon* from Capsa (early fourth century).

Agones in the fourth century

While for the *agones* in Mauretania there is no more evidence after the third century, the *agones* in Africa Proconsularis certainly continued in the fourth century. An exceptional mosaic has been found in baths in the region of Capsa (Fig. 6).[24] The large square (6.6 m × 6.5 m) depicts several phases of a contest: the start and finish of a running contest, the proclamation of a victor, several elements of the *pentathlon*, the three combat sports, a victor with all the symbols of victory, a prize-table, and a torch race. On the basis of the style of the tunics, this mosaic can be

[24] Khanoussi 1988 and 1991b (shorter, but with better photographs); Bohne 2011: K89.

dated to the end of the third or first half of the fourth century. The money bags inscribed with the number XXV confirm the early fourth-century date.[25]

The contest on this mosaic looks traditional: all events are shown, even the *pentathlon*, which was less spectacular than the combat sports and which had therefore long been less popular. This traditional character is less clear in the last scene, which is paralleled by a scene on the incomplete agonistic mosaic from Piazza Armerina. The athletes running with helmets, shields, and torches look like a conflation of the traditional race-in-armor (ὁπλιτοδρομία) and torch races (λαμπαδοδρομία). This 'renewed race-in-armor' was probably not a late-antique innovation, however, but at least two centuries old. Its position in the right lower corner shows that it was the final event, a type of closing ceremony. We know it had had this role since the reign of Hadrian at the latest.[26]

The impressive prize-table indicates it was a large *agon*. It is unlikely that such a contest was held at Capsa: this town, located rather far from the coast, was a bit out of the way for potential competitors. If the mosaic depicts a specific contest, the *Asklepeia* of Carthage are the most likely option, for the golden apples typical of Pythian prize-tables are missing. The continuity of the *Asklepeia* is attested by a mosaic at Althiburos, perhaps from the early fourth century as well, with an inscribed monumental crown.[27]

About a dozen more athletic mosaics are known from Roman North Africa and practically all have been redated to the late third or fourth century since the discovery of the Capsa mosaic. At least for the two busts of athletes from Thapsus, and for the Theveste mosaic with the victorious Marcellus and his sack of money, this date is convincing. For the others, such a late date also is possible, but in no way certain.[28] The mosaic from the baths of Theveste depicts besides Marcellus, who is accompanied by a judge, also a ship, bulls, and several types of animals for a staged hunt along with the number that took part. A mosaic in the Antonine baths of Carthage and another from the so-called Maison des Chevaux combine

[25] For the date of mosaics see also the Introduction, pp. 22ff.

[26] Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 2. Hadrian counts the fifteen days between the *Panathenaia* and the games in Smyrna from the Panathenaic race-in-armor (l. 67: ἀπὸ τοῦ Παναθηναίων ὅπλου). Similarly, the days to the games in Pergamon are counted from the race-in-armor at Smyrna, and the days to the games in Ephesus from that in Pergamon.

[27] SEG XXXII 1089.

[28] Bohne 2011: K88a–K104 for all athletic mosaics of Roman North Africa. Only K88a and K104 are considered Severan or older. Discussed above are K98, 99 (Carthage), K100 (Thapsus), and K103 (Theveste). Also for K94, a good case for a late date can be made, see p. 337 and Fig. 7.

an athlete with a charioteer and horses. Although the presence of different types of games on one mosaic does of course not prove that these were combined in reality – it could just be the commissioners' favorite themes – the numbers and names on the mosaic from Theveste seem to refer to a historical event, which suggests that this may be more than "iconographic contamination."[29]

In the later fourth century, African games seem to have experienced some difficulties. In March 376, the emperor wrote the African proconsul that the athletic contests (*gymnici agonis spectacula*) had to be restored for the happiness of the people.[30] This implies that in the preceding decade(s) some contests in *Africa Proconsularis* had been abandoned, possibly for financial reasons. Most likely these abandoned games were the *Asklepeia* and *Pythia* in Carthage, as these are the only contests we know of. In 376 some notables proposed to pay for the organization of these games (*quae volentium celebretur impensis*) and permission was asked to restore them, which was granted in this imperial rescript. The success of the restoration is attested. About 380, Augustine, at the time still a teacher of rhetoric, won the competition for poets at a Carthaginian contest.[31] Since the crown was handed to him by the proconsul Helvius Vindicianus himself, this must have been an important contest, perhaps the *Pythia*, which would certainly have included an artistic competition.[32] Hugoniot connects the law of 376 to the restoration of the odeon in the period 383–395.[33] There is no reason to see a direct link, but the proposals to renew the games and to restore the odeon, both at the expense of local notables, did stem from the same enthusiasm for games among a part of the late fourth-century Carthaginian elite. Whether feasts of pagan origin could still be allowed had become a point of discussion, however, among the Christian elite of Africa. In 399, the emperor was asked for advice on this topic. In his answers to the African proconsul, he made a distinction between sacrifice and idol worship on the one hand, which were strictly forbidden, and temple buildings and feasts on the other, which could continue to exist. "The common happiness of all" (*communem omnium laetitiam*) was not to be abolished.[34]

These late fourth-century texts show that certain members of the elite in Carthage, among them the proconsul Helvius Vindicianus and Augustine the teacher of rhetoric, still adhered to the traditional idea that

[29] Term from Hugoniot 1998: 685. [30] *Cod. Theod.* 15.7.3.
[31] Augustine, *Confessiones* 4.2 (*theatrici carminis certamen*) and 4.3 (*proconsul manu sua coronam illam agonisticam imposuerat non sano capiti meo*).
[32] Hugoniot 1998: 667–71. [33] Hugoniot 1998: 671–76. [34] *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.17–18.

involvement in *agones*, whether as a competitor in the contest for literature or as an organizer, was a way to attain prestige. Nevertheless, they felt the need to seek imperial support to defend themselves against the protests of opponents. Was this, presumably Christian, anti-movement perhaps connected to the influence of Tertullian's treatise?

How the Carthaginian games eventually came to an end is unclear. The evidence stops in the late fourth century. After 430, *agones* are no longer conceivable in Africa, as the ruling class of Carthage, which had previously supported them, was expelled from the city by the Vandals.[35] A decline of euergetism then led to a disappearance of spectacles in smaller towns, but in large cities such games were still financed by the Vandal monarchs in the fifth and sixth centuries, and described in Latin epigrams.[36] Hence, horse racing, *venationes*, and theatrical shows remained popular here.

[35] Hugoniot 2008: 169.

[36] Briand-Ponsart and Hugoniot 2005: 371–73, 500–02. On spectacles in the Vandal period: Hugoniot 2008. For the circus poems of Luxorius see also Stevens 1988.

Conclusions to Part I

The collapse of the agonistic circuit: a chronology

When competitive athletics became truly international in the late Hellenistic period, a number of top games in Greece, Italy, and Asia formed the basis of a four-year agonistic schedule for competitors, which was reformed by Hadrian to reach its maximum potential. To this basis ever more contests and entire local circuits were attached in the second and third centuries, each new addition profiting from the success of the existing games to become successful itself. The more games a local circuit consisted of, the higher were the chances of victory for those who competed on this circuit and the more competitors were willing to take part. By the third century the international circuit extended from Philippopolis in Thracia to Caesarea in Cappadocia, Bostra in Arabia, Panopolis in Egypt, Caesarea in Mauretania, and Vienne in Gallia Narbonensis.

The expansion of the circuit is well documented by honorary inscriptions and civic coins until the third quarter of the third century, when these publication practices ceased and the further growth, stabilization, or contraction of the circuit was hidden from our view (see Map 6). From the reign of Diocletian on there is no evidence for new foundations, but indications that games came to an end are lacking as well. The likelihood of new foundations or, alternatively, contests coming to a sudden end during the tetrarchy will be discussed in Chapter 12. What can safely be concluded thus far is that, in general, the late third and early fourth century saw athletics continuing to bloom. The sustained popularity of athletic-themed art, especially on mosaics, the enduring building activity at important agonistic sites (e.g. Olympia, Isthmia, Delphi, Rome, Ephesus, Miletus), the recurring references in papyri, and the great interest in *agones* in the rhetorical handbooks of Menander Rhetor and Pseudo-Dionysius all suggest that the *agones* remained quite popular until perhaps

Map 6 Map of *agones* attested in late antiquity.
Legend: ° Last evidence dating from the period 275–350 • Last evidence dating from the period 350–400 * Last evidence dating from the period 400–450 ◊ Last evidence dating from the period after 450

the mid fourth century.[1] Similarly, in Firmicus Maternus' *Mathesis*, an astrological work from the reign of Constantine describing which type of persons were born under which constellations, athletes are still among the best-attested professionals. Even if he relied heavily on earlier treatises, the inclusion of this material is telling.[2]

The first signs that the agonistic circuit was contracting appear in the second quarter of the fourth century. By the mid fourth century *agones* have completely disappeared from the papyrological record. Apparently, the local circuit of the Egyptian *chora* had dissolved. In the rest of the Empire, where minor games are practically invisible, the athletic infrastructure was gradually becoming dilapidated too (e.g. the stadium turned into quarry in Aizanoi, or the lack of restoration at Delphi and Olympia). Given the dependence of local games on one another for their success in attracting competitors, it may be assumed that within various regions clusters of games disappeared in relatively short periods, due to a domino effect. If in an area such as inland Egypt, which had at most a dozen contests – a count leaving ample room for current gaps in our knowledge – two or three contests fell out due to some temporary problems, the organizers of the remaining contests would have had more trouble convincing athletes to do an Egyptian tour. There would have been differences in the pace of the decline between regions, with more prosperous provinces such as Syria keeping their regional circuits longer, but for most regions our evidence is too limited for us to be able to tell when exactly this happened.

In the third quarter of the fourth century the evidence for decline becomes more clear-cut. Athletic-themed art becomes rare. Several *agones* were under a lot of strain. Argos as well as Ephesus experienced financial problems and asked for a better distribution of the costs of the games in the province. The *Aktia* at Nikopolis, a contest in Constantinople, and the games of Carthage were all temporarily abandoned in the mid fourth century, but then restored under Julian or Valens and Valentinian II. As the evidence only rarely allows determining when a contest came to an end, such explicit references to difficulties are invaluable indications of decline.

[1] Both handbooks are introduced and translated in Russell and Wilson 1981, with an edition of the handbook of Menander. An edition of the treatise of Pseudo-Dionysius is incorporated in the Teubner edition of Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

[2] E.g. 3.11.6: *athletas invictos in omnibus certaminibus*; 4.11.4: *athletas, gloriosos interdum*; 6.31.3: *athletam, sed qui sacris certaminibus victor famosa reportet insignia coronarum*. 7.26.3–4 is particularly interesting, since instead of listing all types of people born under a certain constellation, it focuses only on athletes and lists different constellations under which different types of athletes are born.

Nevertheless, there were still professional athletes with an international career, traveling from one contest to the other, from the East to the West. One such athlete was Philoumenos of Philadelphia, who even received a statue at the Roman headquarters of the athletic guild in the 370s. The region from which he originated, western Asia Minor, was still known for producing many competitors. Philoumenos' inscription does not list any cities, but he may well have competed in Rome, Nikopolis, Olympia, Delphi, Isthmia, Argos, Athens, Constantinople, Ephesus, Antioch, Laodicea, Apamea, Alexandria, Carthage, and other cities where the games are just no longer attested.

Several important games survived the fourth century. In the early reign of Theodosius II the basis of the international circuit still existed. A law from 409 mentions *alytarchai* and *agonothetai* and even exempts them from limitations fixed for other sponsors of games.[3] Alytarchs were certainly still officiating in Olympia, Antioch, and Ephesus, and possibly in Alexandria. *Agonothetai* were still active in Rome, Delphi, Aphrodisias (at games for artists), and possibly – if only for a few more years – in Isthmia. Although this list is no doubt incomplete, the total may not have been much higher, given the difficulties already experienced by games in the later fourth century. The reintroduction of a contest was still conceivable as late as 435, but was not at all likely to succeed, as shown by Hypatios' protest in Chalcedon.

The games in Olympia, Ephesus, and on the Isthmus all came to an end in the period between circa 410 and 435. In this quarter century, the basic framework of major games, to which the whole agonistic circuit had traditionally been attached, collapsed. Around the same time the Roman headquarters of the athletic association were turned into a church. Before the middle of the fifth century, Greek athletics as defined in the introduction, that is a specific set of sports practiced at *agones*, had more or less come to an end. Only the Olympics of Antioch are known to have survived into the sixth century as a remnant of this antiquated tradition.

The features of late-antique *agones*

The demise of the games in the fourth and early fifth centuries was largely a matter of quantity: more and more games were abandoned and the contest circuit became ever smaller. When we look at the features of individual games, however, the picture is rather one of continuity. In most respects

[3] *Cod. Theod.* 15.9.2.

the surviving *agones* were similar to earlier *agones*. All the traditional sports of athletic *agones* were preserved: not only the popular combat sports, but also the less spectacular running events and even the *pentathlon*, which was the least spectacular and therefore, in terms of prize money, the least rewarding event. The athletic program and the presentation of victors and prizes on the early fourth-century Capsa mosaic is exactly the same as that of earlier *agones*. Mid and later fourth-century authors too continue to mention these same events.[4] The bronze plate from Olympia attests fourth-century sprinting specialists – even a *triastes* who won the *stadion, diaulos*, and race-in-armor – and a *pentathlon* victor of 381. The plate also documents the longevity of a separate competition for boys. The race-in-armor, in its imperial-age version with torches, still seems to have had the role of closing ceremony, as it had in the second century AD. At least for Antioch, the evidence moreover assures us that the fourth-century crowd was still widely enthusiastic for the contests and the athletes, who were attracted from other provinces.

The agonistic program was not resistant to all change, however. In the early fourth century there was still an openness to new fashions. Popular new events could thus become part of the program. A good imperial-age example is the inclusion of competitions for pantomimes, and later also mimes, in artistic contests.[5] There is no evidence that the most prestigious contests, such as the Pythian games in Delphi, ever took up this new event, as they owed their prestige to their long traditions, but newer games were more inclined to adopt temporary fashions in order to strengthen their positions in the contest circuit. From about 300, athletic games similarly started to include the new combat sport *pammachon*. At the turn of the century, it was not yet a fixed part of the program; it was added to the *ad hoc* contest for Diocletian in Alexandria only when several other competitions had already ended. Over the course of the century, however, it seems to have become more common. On his monument in Rome, Philoumenos of Philadelphia lists it as the first of his four specialties, in which he competed all over the world.[6]

The contests were of course only one part of a larger feast.[7] The continuity of other aspects of the games is best attested for Antioch, particularly in the work of Libanius. A speech by a famous rhetor, a procession to the sanctuary,

[4] E.g. John Chrysostom, *Hom. 1 in Matthaeum* (PG 57) 395; Libanius, *Or.* 64.68–69; Themistius, *Or.* 15.196a.
[5] Webb 2008: 31. [6] For this sport and all late-antique references see Remijsen 2010b: 201–04.
[7] E.g. Herz 1997: 239 for the different parts of Greek feasts.

and a festive banquet were all still part of the feast in the second half of the fourth century. The ceremonial garb of the contest president as described by Malalas resembles that of earlier presidents, as do his responsibilities. The question of whether, and how far, the organization of the feast was adapted to new religious reality of late antiquity deserves closer attention and will be further discussed in Chapter 9.

The emergence of the circus and the demise of the *agones*

While the features of an *agon* remained stable, what did change was the relationship between athletics and other entertainment. The most important evolution in the fourth-century entertainment sector is the introduction of circus races in the East. In the Greek world, horse races were traditionally not organized as independent events, but as a part of Greek *agones*, held on simple racing tracks barely or not at all monumentalized. Wealthy contestants hired charioteers to drive in their names. The underrepresentation of these races in the evidence from the later Hellenistic period on suggests that this competition had become less attractive, but equestrian events were still included in *agones*, not only in major cities, but even in more inland towns such as Antinoopolis.[8] In the mid third century, the Athenian *periodonikes* Prometheus prided himself on winning equestrian events at more than sixty different contests.[9] Yet he seems to have been an exception. Unlike athletes or performing artists, most owners of horses did not travel around the Mediterranean, probably because it was too expensive, as the considerably higher costs for transport were not offset by higher prizes. This relative lack of professionalism explains the scarcity of agonistic inscriptions for equestrian victors.

In cosmopolitan cities in the East, such as Alexandria or Antioch, horse races were occasionally organized as separate spectacles from the early imperial period on, just as they were in the West. In the first three centuries AD, there is little evidence that these independent races spread to smaller cities, not even when these received a circus rather than a stadium to accommodate *agones*, as sometimes happened in regions that did not have a long tradition of constructing stadia. When the Empire's center of gravity shifted to the East in the early fourth century, circuses were, after the Roman example, constructed in connection to palaces in the tetrarchic capitals. After circus games had first become fashionable in these new capitals, they quickly became popular throughout the East.[10] The new

[8] Cameron 1976: 204–05. [9] IAG 89 = IG II² 3769. [10] Cameron 1976: 206–14.

circus games do not properly fit either the races "in the Greek style" or those "in the Roman style," as defined by Cameron and Humphrey.[11] Although these races could be connected to festivals of pagan gods such as Poseidon or Kalliope[12], they were not in the Greek style, as they were held separately from athletic events. Neither were they held in the same way as in Rome, as in the fourth century they were not organized by the 'colors' – stables organizing all aspects of the games. Instead, procuring the horses was a liturgy, the *hippotrophia*. This type of organization lacked the voluntary aspect of participation in Greek games, but equally failed to reproduce the centralized organization of those at Rome. If anything, this liturgical organization was typical of imperial-age civic life, as were the *agones* when they had spread to Italy, North Africa, and Gaul. In the course of the fifth century – and only in Constantinople and Alexandria already in the fourth – the factions did take up a role in the practical organization of the games and an increased financial control by the imperial administration became noticeable. The geographical expansion of the factions coincided with a thematic expansion: all other forms of entertainment that could potentially be connected with the circus, such as shows of mimes or pantomimes, *venationes*, acrobatics, etc., came under their control.[13]

Already by the mid fourth century the circus took over the *agones*' position as the most popular games in the East. The role of the emergence of the circus in the decline of Greek athletics is not straightforward, however, and will be analyzed in detail in Part II. The *agones* and circus games thrived on the same love for spectacles and on the same readiness among the local elite to preside over shows. Those cities where *agones* continued longest were also those which first adopted Roman horse racing, as these were the places with the liveliest civic life. The best example is no doubt Syria, where the two types of games occurred side by side for a reasonably long time – in Antioch for more than two centuries. In smaller cities, for example in the Egyptian provincial towns, where the *agones* had already disappeared in the first half of the fourth century, horse racing is attested only in the second half of the century, after some decades during which these towns were apparently devoid of large-scale games.

The circus even saved athletics from total disappearance, for it created new opportunities for athletes, who, just like other entertainers, could hire themselves out to give demonstration matches in between the races or for minor shows on days when there were no races. The troupe of *pammacharii*

[11] Cameron 1976: 210–13; Humphrey 1986: 438–41.
[12] Libanius, *Or*. 1.230; *Ep*. 811.
[13] Cameron 1976: 214–22.

at Tyre looking for a boat to Constantinople, the performers from which Malalas tries to distinguish his Olympic athletes, the athletes on circus programs from Oxyrhynchus, the pankratiasts on the Kovacs vase, or the runners Cassiodorus locates in the sixth-century Colosseum are all examples of a new type of athlete. They were in several respects very different from their colleagues and predecessors at the *agones*, as will be explained in Chapter 10 and Chapter 13, but nevertheless they continued some aspects of the athletic tradition long past the collapse of the agonistic circuit.

PART II

Agones *in a changing world*

A ban on athletics? The top–down model of decline

From the early fourth century on the agonistic circuit gradually shrank, until by the mid fifth century most, though not all, of the contests were gone. The traditional explanation for the end of the games asserts that they were successfully banned by Theodosius I in 393 (or by Theodosius II in AD 420 or 435), which implies a sudden and general disappearing of *agones*, in contrast to the relatively slow pace of the historical decline as we find it in the ancient sources. If there was ever a ban on *agones*, then it was obviously not general or immediately effective. Yet this alone is not enough to disprove the hypothesis of a ban; the firmly attested bans on pagan sacrifices were not immediately and generally effective either.[1] The pace of decline, however, is not the only problem with the traditional explanation.

The model of the religiously inspired imperial ban goes back, as we have seen in Chapter 1, to a strained interpretation of the sources: a brief and unreliable passage in Kedrenos, which dates the end of the Olympics to the reign of Theodosius I, or alternatively a scholion on Lucian, which dates the same event to the reign of his grandson, is connected to the imperial anti-pagan policy documented by the *Codex Theodosianus*. However, neither the notion that the *agones* came to an end because of an imperial enactment, nor the idea that the *agones* were included among the pagan rites forbidden in the 390s, is supported by the exact wording of the texts. The pillars on which this theory is built are thus highly speculative. As a result, the traditional explanation has recently been discredited by various scholars.[2] Thus far, however, only the absence of explicit proof has been firmly established. Yet the lack of evidence does not by itself prove the theory wrong, certainly considering that sources for the end of the *agones*

[1] See pp. 184ff. [2] Most importantly Weiler 2004. See also Sinn 2002; Gutsfeld 2013.

are extremely scanty anyway. Whatever happened, we are unlikely to find it documented in any great detail.

In order to re-evaluate the traditional model that the end of the *agones* was imposed from above, the problem needs to be analyzed on a different level, namely by questioning its underlying assumptions: is it likely or even possible that the *agones* were banned by the Roman emperor and/or on account of their link to pagan cult? To confirm or disprove the supposed ban one should, in other words, explore on the one hand whether the *agones* were still regarded as religious pagan feasts in late antiquity, and hence incompatible with Christianity, or had undergone instead some sort of secularization process, and on the other hand whether emperors indeed played an active role in the management of the *agones*. As the agonistic circuit declined over the course of more than a century, this entire chronological range needs to be included in the analysis. Chapter 8 will therefore examine whether the pagan elements of the late-antique *agones* were adapted to the new religious atmosphere at various stages of the fourth and fifth centuries. We are not looking for straightforward patterns of cause and consequence between the spread of Christianity and the decline of the agonistic circuit, for although roughly contemporary these two phenomena did not follow exactly the same chronological and geographical pattern.[3] Instead, the emphasis will lie on the differences in interpretations of the religious nature of the games among various sections of the population, and on the extent to which religious scruples may have affected some people's actions. Chapter 9 then evaluates the hypothesis that the emperor played an active role in the demise of the *agones*. The interventions of late-antique emperors, documented in the first place by legal texts, cannot be understood in a vacuum: they followed – or potentially broke with – long-established imperial roles. Therefore, this chapter will discuss late-antique imperial policy against the background of the traditional mechanics of imperial involvement in *agones*: what kind of initiatives regarding athletics were commonly taken by the imperial court; to what kind of impulses did they normally react; and what considerations were usually taken into account by emperors taking decisions on *agones*?

[3] Often, of course, the pace of conversion cannot be determined, but in some areas there seem to be discrepancies. In the Egyptian *chora agones* seem to have disappeared in the second quarter of the fourth century, not long after or even before the first prohibition of sacrifice. Depauw and Clarysse 2013: 433 estimate, on the basis of a very large dataset, that Christians formed at the time about 40 percent of the population; 50 percent was reached circa 360. In Aphrodisias, where the athletic *agones* had disappeared by the late fourth century, the elite seems to have converted particularly late, perhaps in the course of the fifth century, according to Trombley 1993: II.52–73. Antioch, on the other hand, had been largely Christian for more than a century before the Olympics came to their end.

Bottom–up transformations

After the argument in Chapters 8 and 9 that the decline of Greek athletics was not directed from the top down as a result of opposition from the authorities, Chapters 10 to 13 explore the inverse possibility: that the collapse of the agonistic circuit had started in the minds and with the actions of those actively involved in the games. The world surrounding the *agones* was changing in late antiquity. In order to survive, the stakeholders of the games had to adapt the agonistic traditions to the new reality. This brings us back to the definition of decline proposed in the introduction: why were the people involved in athletic contests no longer able nor willing to adapt them to the new realities of the late-antique world?

The fate of Greek athletics lay in the hands of those who, given the talent and/or determination, could choose to be involved in the *agones*: laymen, with an urban lifestyle and relatively well off, who were in a position to make choices to invest in social and cultural capital. This group ranges from the billionaires of late antiquity to struggling smallholders, who nevertheless still represented an elite compared to the masses living on or below subsistence level. The composition of this section of society may be roughly compared to that of the *decuriones* – though membership of the *curia* was of course no prerequisite for involvement in athletics. If members of this broad elite wanted to, they could arrange athletic training for their children, pursue careers as independent traveling competitors, pass a decree in the city council on the foundation of an *agon*, sponsor athletics games, or lobby for financial solutions. More and more they failed to do so, however. Chapters 10 to 13 investigate why this was no longer a choice they made. The book focuses on the main groups of stakeholders of the *agones*, the participants and the organizers. For each group, the book will devote one chapter to the institutional circumstances that may have impeded their organization of the games and another to their changing perceptions of contests and of the career of competitor, which may have affected their willingness to adapt.

Part I portrayed athletes moving in diverse social circles, from an Armenian prince to an Egyptian day-laborer, and athletes who performed in diverse settings, from the most traditional of the *agones* in Greece to the circus of late-antique *metropoleis*. Chapter 10 studies this variety among the athletic professionals on the level of social status and on the level of professional organizations, with reference to the preceding period. Among the late-antique athletes, one can clearly distinguish two groups: upper-class career athletes competing at the *agones* and lower-class athlete performers fighting

in different settings such as the circus. A central question is how this growing discrepancy affected their organizational structures, such as the so-called xystic synod. Chapter 11 explores the perceptions among the urban elite – that is among the potential career athletes – of athletics as an activity one could personally engage in. Here, the focus lies on the associations between athletics and specific virtues and vices, and how these associations changed in late antiquity when a new value-set challenged traditional means of elite self-definition.

The changing financial and administrative situation of the *agones* will be analyzed in Chapter 12. Without reference to the organizational structures of the second and third centuries it can again not be understood why the new financial and institutional situations of late antiquity challenged and affected the *agones*. This chapter investigates in the first place the practical details of the organization: How was an *agon* financed? Which officials or institutions founded and administered the contests? What were the potential political and social benefits for the citizens involved? The last chapter, Chapter 13, is then devoted to the perceptions of athletic contests as an event worth organizing. The upsurge of Roman-style games affected the way in which people thought about games: it seems that it forced people in the eastern Mediterranean to develop or borrow new categories or cognitive schemata to structure and make sense of the entertainment sector. This resulted in a process of 'spectacularization', which does not necessarily imply a strong change in taste, but primarily a new set of assumptions regarding the effect of spectacles on the public.

Categories of analysis

Chapter 11 and Chapter 13 study how the urban elite perceived the career of a competitor, athletic training as a pastime, and athletic contests. They aim to find out what spontaneous associations people made when they practiced athletics or saw (read about, heard about, etc.) others doing so and in what light they saw these people, consciously but also unconsciously. Because the book aims to explain changing social practices, the focus lies on *shared* perceptions – or mentality, used not as a psychological term for a cast of mind inherent to an entire society or culture,[4] but in the sense of the thought processes, values, and beliefs shared widely or within a particular section of society and acquired as a result of a socialization process. Awareness of reigning norms and values is an important social

[4] For an argument against this use of mentality see Lloyd 1990.

skill; throughout their lives, people inherit norms and values from established members of a group and disseminate them to newcomers. This does not mean that this shared set of associations and perceptions is clearly defined and stable, any more than is the population that shares it. Our analysis covers the period from the later third century to the early sixth, in which society underwent major changes and the value-set evolved. During these centuries, the perceptions of *agones* shared and disseminated among the broad lay urban male elite also gradually changed and this could not but affect the *agones* themselves.

Literary discourse can help us to understand how the urban upper classes thought, as long as one can distinguish between on the one hand the individual and potentially subversive perceptions of the author and on the other the more general frame of reference that lay behind it, as something either unconsciously ascribed to or consciously engaged with.[5] Individual opinions reflect or promote social changes only if they find resonance in society. Because the late-antique authors represent a small number of people with a strong intellectual bias, we have to compare the perceptions that can be distilled from their texts, with other types of evidence. How people think, believe, and judge is expressed not only in what they say, but foremost in what they do, especially in what they do regularly and publicly.[6] Therefore, the book will pay considerable attention to practices, that is to actions which did not merely result from individual initiative, but which represent a process of negotiation or socialization. This includes customs such as visiting the baths, which because of their regular and public character helped to integrate an individual into the community and disseminated common perceptions of physical activities. It also includes institutions, as these not only embody the values of those who founded them, but also transmit them to following generations. A good example is the ephebate, which made athletics an important instrument for citizen education: the development and spread of the ephebate is a strong indicator that a positive perception of athletics was shared by a large part of society, as an institutionalized type of education reveals not only what the parents wanted to pass on to their children, but also that the community agreed with their assessment of what was important. Social hierarchies too can constitute revealing practices: official markers of status, including

[5] Edwards 1993: 63–97, Lada-Richards 2007: 64–78 show for example, starting from literary discourse, widespread associations between certain gestures and activities of the male body and a suspicion of effeminacy and promiscuity.

[6] See MacMullen 1986b: 324 on the question of how we can test what difference Christianity made: "That test must show Christians not just talking but doing."

privileges such as reserved seats at public events or legal restrictions such as *infamia*, result from a consensus of the ruling class, which formally decided to grant this privilege or impose this restriction.

The book does not intend to identify the shared perceptions of the elite as characteristic of a specific religion. In the structure presented above, Chapter 8 deals only with the questions of whether the *agones* could be perceived as a religious festival and by whom. Neither this chapter, nor Chapter 11 and Chapter 13 on the perception of athletics, aim to analyze *the* Christian position on *agones*, for postulating such a position implies that the Christians formed a stable and sharply delineated group, the members of which all shared the same ideas and all perceived athletics from a specifically Christian perspective. Many scholars of late antiquity have observed the great variety among Christians and in the experience of religious identity as well as the impossibility of making a distinction between the culture of the Christian and pagan elite.[7] There was not an original Christian set of associations between athletics and moral values, in the way that Greek and Roman cultures had developed typical associations while engaging with their own traditions of games. The early Christians lived within the Graeco-Roman world and their moral criticisms show a great dependence on existing ideas. Of course, this did not keep Christian authors from interpreting them in Christian terms. However, to grasp the – at first sight puzzling – contradictions in late-antique Christian discourse, which can link the Olympics to the devil, but on the same page describe metaphorical athletes in the most positive light, and ultimately to understand why the athletic contests lost popularity, we must focus on how perceptions of late-antique games developed in a multiform cultural world, rather than focusing on the religious interpretation by specific authors.

Nor were the late-antique Christians a clearly delineated group. As the fundamental sociological research of Brubaker[8] has shown, groups, especially ethnic or religious communities, are never permanent entities. Instead, they are flexible and a sense of belonging is activated only by circumstances; therefore it is dangerous to use such groups as an analytical category. This methodological objection is valid for 'Romans' or 'Greeks' too. One could use various definitions in assigning people to either or both of these groups (culture, location, citizenship), but none of these will tell us anything about who felt 'Roman' or 'Greek' and in which contexts they did

[7] Recently e.g. Kahlos 2005; Sandwell 2007; Cameron 2011; Rebillard 2012.
[8] Brubaker 2004: esp. 1–65.

so, or about the strength of the connectedness of these groups. Even if people, in specific situations, ascribed themselves to one or several of these groups, these ethnic and religious identifications did not necessarily matter in each interaction. People have a plurality of identities that can each be activated in any given situation, but not all of these are activated in everyday life. Social affiliations are often preferred to memberships of ethnic or religious groups.[9] Some people may have felt 'Christian' when engaging with *agones*, but many would not, even if they did feel 'Christian' when attending church. The 'groupness' that was usually activated when practicing athletics is in fact more likely to have been membership of a cultural elite.[10] Precisely the elite self-identification and perceptions form a recurring theme in Part II.

[9] Rebillard 2012: 74. Cf. Brubaker 2004: 44–45 on the importance of self-understanding and social location for individual and collective action.
[10] Van Nijf 2003, 2004.

CHAPTER 8

A religious ban?

Pagan, Christian, and secular

What we today understand by 'paganism' was a wide set of divergent traditional customs centered around the general belief that there were multiple gods, who could exercise their power over people and the world and who could be propitiated or thanked with sacrifices at an altar in one of their sanctuaries. Even though in the East, Greek culture had come to provide the names, language, anthropomorphic representations, and even festivals by which local practices were communicated in the wider Mediterranean context, in general practices such as the name and representation of gods, myths, rites, temple designs, etc. differed strongly across the Mediterranean. Pagans were, therefore, not a clearly delineated group and did not conceive of themselves as a single category until the Christians identified them as such. From the early fourth century on a common denomination for 'pagans' was increasingly used by Christians and the adherents of traditional religions alike: *Hellenes*. The choice of the word for 'Greeks' to identify this newly created category reflects the importance of Greek culture for the communication of pagan practices.[1]

Until the early fourth century, the rituals executed for the welfare of the state were traditional Graeco-Roman – or pagan – religious practices. The new position of Christianity from Constantine onward, however, changed the state's relationship with traditional religion. In a world dominated by Christian emperors and administrators, many aspects of traditional ancient culture were open to being considered as either harmless unreligious practices or offensive 'pagan' religious rituals. In order to identify the potential dangers, social and cultural practices were increasingly divided into three categories, namely Christian (good), pagan (bad), or secular (neutral). In regard to many ancient customs, however, such as literature,

[1] Bowersock 1990: 5–13.

visual arts, emperor worship, and games, the category was not universally agreed upon. The main question in this chapter is whether and by whom games, and specifically *agones*, were understood as pagan and hence incompatible with a Christian Empire or as secular and hence compatible.[2]

Christian polemics certainly argued for the religious nature of games and thus for a complete repudiation of the *agones*. The two most elaborate and explicit argumentations can be found in the *De spectaculis* by Tertullian from circa 200 and in Novatian's treatise with the same title from circa 250. Tertullian goes into great detail to demonstrate the pagan character of the *agones*: they were instituted for pagan gods or dead men and their names referred to these, they were presided over by priests who performed a bloody sacrifice of bulls, and they were held near temples containing idol statues.[3] Novatian similarly stressed that all spectacles were dedicated to dead people and gods and that they included idol worship and bloody sacrifices.[4] The *Canons of Hippolytus*, composed in Egypt shortly before 340, barred people working in the entertainment sector from hearing the Scriptures: theater directors, wrestlers, runners, musicians, those playing in processions, gladiators, hunters, horse trainers, and *bestiarii*. To this list of impure professions were added pagan priests, which implies that pagan ritual was the element they all had in common and made purification and edification necessary before they could be accepted in the community of baptized Christians.[5] The sacrificial ritual and worship of the idol are not only the recurring elements in Christian analyses of the religious nature of games; they were equally common criteria by which pagans identified the *agones* as religious. A rhetorical handbook of the third or fourth century, for example, expresses the centrality of the pagan cult in games when advising always to start a speech held for games with praise for the god.[6]

Although the link with traditional gods was obvious for some, it did not preclude others from seeing games in a non-religious light. There was a large gray zone between hardline Christians and hardline pagans.[7] Even though Minucius Felix, who wrote shortly after Tertullian, makes his pagan character Caecilius observe the absence of Christians from spectacles, processions, banquets, and sacred contests as a general rule, Christian

[2] For the problem of the secular character of Roman games see Belayche 2007; Lim 2009: 497–502.
[3] Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 11. [4] Novatian, *De spectaculis* 4–5.
[5] *Canons of Hippolytus* (PO 31) 12–14. Soldiers and judges were treated separately as these professions were problematic for a different reason: that they involved killing.
[6] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ars rhetorica* 1.256 (in Teubner edition of Dionysius of Halicarnassus). Chapter 1 concerns the τέχνη περὶ τῶν πανηγυρικών.
[7] Kahlos 2005: esp. 468.

abstinence was in fact far from general.[8] Tertullian and Novatian wrote their treatises exactly because a section of their Christian audience managed to ignore religious aspects when attending games.[9] Through the counter-arguments of the polemicists, one can see how these more tolerant Christians defended their attendance: by pointing out that spectacles were not forbidden by Scripture and by mentioning biblical references to musical instruments and dancing and, as a legitimation of athletic games in particular, Paul's use of agonistic metaphors.[10] Personal experience of an *agon* depended largely on one's character and interests: people who just visited the market and the contest could easily avoid or ignore the religious aspects – even if they may have had to pass stalls selling miniature statues of the god. Moreover, although many people would have identified themselves when asked either as Christian or as an adherent of traditional cults, their religion was not necessarily a principle they acted on in daily life.[11] Some who identified as Christians on their funerary monuments evidently involved themselves closely in the contests: in Asia Minor, third-century Christian epitaphs were found for an athlete and a contest president.[12] There are likewise – admittedly uncertain – traces of Christians visiting Olympia in the fourth or even third century.[13] Even some clerics were open-minded and interacted with athletes: around 270, bishop Sotas of Oxyrhynchus happened to meet his fellow citizen Sarapammon, an internationally renowned athlete, in Antioch, and collegially promised to take his winnings home to his mother while the athlete traveled further on the circuit.[14] For the horse races there is similar evidence that the actual behavior of members of the clergy at the games did not always mirror the typical clerical discourse on games.[15] The question of whether *agones* were considered pagan or secular has to be treated with an openness toward individual differences.

A second type of openness is that toward historical change. Thus far most of our examples of Christian objections derive from the third century. The polemicists Tertullian and Novatian wrote when Christians still formed a minority which could not influence the authorities. In the fourth century, however, Christians could effect change to elements of the *agones*

[8] Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 12.
[9] Their audience may have been limited: the antiquarian style of Tertullian suggests that his work was addressed to a more intellectual public. See Lim 2009: 504.
[10] Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 3; Novatian, *De spectaculis* 2.
[11] Cf. Rebillard 2012: 74.
[12] SEG VI 203, IK Klaudiu polis 44.
[13] Philipp 1981: 185, nos. 669 and 670; Mallwitz 1972: 116.
[14] SB XII 10772. See Luijendijk 2008: 136–44 for the date and identification of Sotas.
[15] Evidence collected in Puk 2012: 39–41.

that were offensive to them. As the sacrifice and the link with the idol in the temple appear as the most offensive to third-century Christian authors, these particular aspects of the *agones* are most likely to have undergone change or even to have disappeared in the fourth century. This chapter hence treats from a historical perspective the specific criteria on the basis of which (some) people identified the *agones* as pagan and incompatible with Christianity. Were the sacrifice, the link with the temple, and the name of the contest so compelling as signs of paganism in the fourth and the fifth century as they were in the third, or had a process of 'secularization' taken place?

Bloody sacrifices

To Tertullian and Novatian the traditional sacrifice of a large number of oxen to the pagan god, represented by a cult statue, was the most offensive part of the games. Although sacrificing is found in the Old Testament, for many Christians it was nevertheless a disgusting custom, typical of 'the other'. During Christ's lifetime, the Jews still performed sacrifices according to traditional rules, but this practice was limited to the temple in Jerusalem and disappeared with its destruction in 70. Bloody sacrifices were never incorporated in Christian rituals as the new religion developed and spread in the first century.[16] The historical trauma of the third-century persecutions, when people were obliged to sacrifice to show that they were loyal imperial subjects, no doubt intensified the Christian disgust of this practice. When Christianity then came to be promoted under the Constantinian dynasty, influential members of the Church lobbied for the abolition of pagan practices and in particular of the, in certain contexts obligatory, sacrifices. Possibly Constantine himself abolished sacrificing in certain contexts,[17] but Constantius II and his co-emperor Constans more generally prohibited animal sacrifices. In a law of 341, they decreed that "superstition and the madness of the sacrifices" had to cease.[18] The intention and effect of this constitution is not entirely clear, however. It can, for example, be disputed whether it already constituted an Empire-wide ban. Technically, the rescript was directed only to the vicar of Italy and Africa, but of course this does not mean that such a decree was issued only to him. As many constitutions in this chapter of the *Codex* come from Africa and Italy, it seems likely that the editors had access to an archive relating to this

[16] Stroumsa 2005: 105–44, esp. 115, 118, 139.
[17] Chuvin 1990: 37–39; Van Dam 2007: 27–34.
[18] *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.2.

region. There is no suggestion of local particularities in this decree, so it is certainly possible that other administrators received a similar rescript, of which we have no copy.

Even if it was meant as an Empire-wide prohibition, it still left room for different local interpretations of what exactly was forbidden. The use of the word *superstitio* could mean all pagan ritual to a Christian, but could equally suggest to pagan administrators that only sacrifices in the context of divination and magic were forbidden.[19] The latter interpretation left room to allow the great public sacrifice of an *agon*. Even the narrower interpretation, however, could theoretically affect the *agones*, as a link between athletics and magic is well attested. As today, ancient competitors liked to have the feeling that they could control the contest and to this purpose they performed victory rites or *niketika*[20] and, more commonly, binding spells and rites directed at eliminating the competition.[21] Athletes thus had the reputation of possessing intimate knowledge about black magic and evil potions. Libanius describes in his autobiography how his enemy Festus tried to harm him in about 365 with the help of a certain Martyrius, a harmless fellow whom Festus nevertheless thought to be a sorcerer because of his association with wrestlers.[22] Around the same period, in 369–370, the wrestler Asbolius in Rome was similarly accused of poisoning.[23] This reputation of involvement in dangerous magic was not typical of athletes alone; it could taint all types of entertainers.[24] Although the anecdotes illustrate that athletes could be prosecuted for black magic, there is no reason to assume that these practices were specifically targeted by the 341 law. Nor does the connection with magic seem to have influenced the identification of *agones* as pagan; magic was ubiquitous among Christians as well as pagans in late antiquity.

As clarity about the intent of the decree certainly did not exist in 341, this year should not be taken as the moment at which all pagan sacrifice ended. Subsequent laws, however, offered clarifications and spread knowledge of

[19] Salzman 1990: 206. [20] P.Oxy. XII 1478, Pap.Graec.Mag. I 4, ll. 2159–2160.

[21] Tremel 2004: nos. 8 (= SEG XLIV 308) and 10: fourth-century lead tablets from Isthmia and Oxyrhynchus with binding spells against athletes.

[22] *Or*. 1.156–159. [23] Ammianus Marcellinus 28.1.8.

[24] Asbolius was claimed to have cooperated with a musician and a haruspex. For charioteers, see Ammianus Marcellinus 26.3.3, 4.25, or *Cod. Theod*. 9.16.11. Webb 2008: 173–75 suggests that buildings meant for public entertainment were considered particularly attractive to demons, as people engaged or entranced in the spectacle were vulnerable victims. The anecdote in *Vita Theodori Syceotae* 88 (ed. Festugière 1970) of how St. Theodore of Sykeon cured a wrestler possessed by an evil spirit shows that this belief in demons roaming entertainment buildings lived on in the Christian late sixth century.

the ban. A law from 342 makes explicit that the end of superstition did not affect the rural temples of Rome; these buildings had to remain untouched. Several laws of the 350s repeated the ban, imposing severe penalties on people who sacrifice.[25] Soon the ban on sacrificing seems to have been widely known in the Roman Empire. Libanius refers to it and explains that the prohibition involved only bloody sacrifices and libations, not other types of offering such as incense.[26] Private sacrifices seem to have remained above the law, but public cult now typically consisted of traditional litanies and procession, without sacrificial ritual.[27] For lay Christians this solved the problem of civic priesthoods. Priesthoods of the imperial cult constituted an important step in a political career, as they traditionally not only performed public sacrifices for the well-being of emperor and state, but also distributed money and food and sponsored entertainments. At the council of Elvira (circa 305–310), the fate of Christian *flamines* was still a point of discussion, but without sacrifices such functions became less problematic and offered opportunities for the ambitious Christian.[28]

One should not overestimate the impact of a ban on bloody sacrifices on society at large, and on the games in particular. Even among pagans animal sacrifices had gradually become controversial. Neopythagorean and neoplatonic philosophers had already expressed their distaste for bloody sacrifices in the second and third centuries. More spiritual offerings such as incense, perfume, and the lighting of lamps had gained popularity and these alternative offerings remained permitted after the prohibition. Julian's reintroduction of bloody sacrifices met with little success.[29] In mixed communities public banquets with sacrificial meat – as opposed to ordinary meat – created conflict, rather than the communality they were seeking. Therefore, Constantius' decision may have been an acceptable compromise for many pagans. They could still give offerings to the gods and eat meat and drink wine during feasts; they could just not put a part of this meat on the altar for the god. This is exactly what seems to have happened during the *agones*. Unlike Tertullian or Novatian, later opponents of *agones* (e.g. John Chrysostom) do not mention sacrifices, although these would have been the most offensive element of all if they were still

[25] *Cod. Theod*. 16.10.3–6. Cf. Salzman 1990: 205–09.
[26] *Or*. 30.6–7, 17–18.
[27] Trombley 1993: I.5.
[28] *Canons of the Council of Elvira* 2–4 (ed. Dale 1882: 315–16). General considerations about Christians and civic priesthoods in Bowes 2008: 22–23.
[29] Chuvin 1990: 237–44; Bradbury 1995: 332–47. The latter especially discusses the distorted communal value at banquets and the neoplatonic ideas. For the disapproval of bloody sacrifices by the neopythagorean Apollonius of Tyana see Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 5.25.

performed. This lack of Christian complaints about the sacrifice from the fourth century on suggests that the ban on sacrifices was indeed respected during *agones* and that the religious ceremony was toned down to an offering of incense – until 392, when this was likewise forbidden[30] – and that the animals for the banquet were slaughtered elsewhere. This removal of the public and ritual killing was, all in all, a small intervention. The banquet itself remained an important event organized by the contest president. Libanius even devoted an entire oration to the subject.[31] The office of *agonothetes* could moreover remain an office with great promotional value, now the task had become purely organizational and financial.

Himerius is the last pagan to mention a sacrifice at an *agon*: "Greeks honor Poseidon, god of horses, and at the Isthmus they sacrifice to the god."[32] This passage comes from an oration (*Or.* 47) delivered in an unknown Panathenaic year. It was addressed to the provincial governor Basilius, who has been identified with different notables: he could either be the son of the consul of 327, which would place the oration early in Himerius' career (e.g. 347, 351, 355), or he could be the *praefectus urbi* of 395, which would place the governorship and the oration in the 370s or 380s.[33] Even though the arguments for the earlier option are definitely strongest,[34] certainty about the date cannot be obtained. Without a date, the historical evaluation of this passage is difficult, as a transgression of the law against sacrificing would be more striking the later it took place. It is not even certain, however, that this passage attests an illegal sacrifice of meat and wine. It can be read as a legal offering of incense. In the rest of the oration, which is devoted to the Panathenaic procession, Himerius is in fact careful not to offend Christians. He for example does not mention any sacrifices to Athena.

The temple and the procession

The religious character of the games need not, of course, have lain solely in the sacrifice. Although the city had long replaced the temple as organizer of the event (see Chapter 12), most *agones* still took place in or near pagan sanctuaries. A typical agonistic festival started with a procession of the

[30] *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.12. [31] *Or.* 53. See also *Or.* 30.17–18.
[32] *Or.* 47.10: ἵππειον Ποσειδῶνα τιμῶσιν Ἕλληνες καὶ θύουσιν ἐπὶ Ἰσθμῷ τῷ θεῷ.
[33] Barnes 1987: 217–18; Penella 2007: 208–09. Critical edition of this text in Colonna 1951.
[34] Basilius is described as the son of a consul in *Or.* 46.8, which the second Basilius does not seem to have been.

officials, competitors, and supporters from the city to the sanctuary where the games would take place (for example from Elis to Olympia or from Antioch to Daphne). In or near the sanctuary there would then be held – not necessarily in this order – speeches, contests, crowning ceremonies, and a large banquet.[35] After the mid fourth century *agones* could still be seen as religious festivals. This is how Julian saw it when he discussed the *agon Solis* (possibly before his reintroduction of sacrificing, though that is not certain), Libanius when he promoted the Antiochene *Olympia*, or Himerius when he described the *Panathenaia*.[36] Libanius even complained that the behavior of the crowd at the preliminary matches diminished their sacral character.[37]

Christians too could still find pagan elements. A first issue was the link between *agones* and temples. Temples were contested places in the second half of the fourth century. As a result of the fourth-century anti-pagan laws, cult statues and altars had to be removed from the building or made inaccessible to avoid the sin of sacrificing and idolatry.[38] Regarding the closure and destruction of buildings, however, laws were contradictory: while some decreed complete closure and even destruction of temples, others explicitly ordered that the buildings be saved and the statues in them valued as works of art.[39] It is unlikely that there was ever an Empire-wide order to destroy temples, or at least there was none with Empire-wide effect. Despite their generalizing language, most laws were reactions to specific problems. There were great local differences in the prudence of pagans, the tolerance of Christians, or the zeal of fundamentalists; individual church leaders had, moreover, a considerable influence on the local situation.

The closure of the temples for cultic activities raised the question of what to do with the games. Several laws explain that the closure of temples rendered idol worship illegal but not festivities. A law from 342 explicitly mentions the exemption of rural sanctuaries from which *ludi, circenses*, and *agones* originated. Two laws from the late fourth century approve more vaguely of the celebration of *vota*, the festive gatherings of citizens and the shared happiness of all.[40] These laws offered people in the cities a good

[35] See for example Herz 1997: 239; Slater 2007: 21–23 for the different elements of Greek festivals.
[36] Panegyrici Latini 3.9.2-3; Julian, *Or.* 11.41-42 (i.e. 4.155B and 156C); Libanius, *Or.* 11.269, *Ep.* 843; Himerius, *Or.* 47.13.
[37] *Or.* 10, esp. 6 (μυστήριων τε τιμὴν εἶχε).
[38] Trombley 1993: I.12.
[39] E.g. *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.3 (save rural temples), 4 (close temples), 11 (nobody can enter), 15 (preservation of ornaments), 16 (tear down rural temples), 18 (do not destroy temples), 19 (clear temples for public use), 25 (destroy temples).
[40] *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.3 (342), 16.10.8 (382), 16.10.17 (399).

argument for categorizing games as secular, but the need to repeat the point again and again shows that within several communities a consensus could not be reached on this matter, and the authorities had to be asked for advice.

In order not to alienate that part of the community that had religious scruples about the celebration of *agones*, the next step in the secularization was that temples lost their role in the public ceremonial of the games. Because the sporting infrastructure was often spatially separated from the temple, the temple could in many cases be easily removed from the ceremonial when its role became problematic. Most cities had only one stadium, where *agones* instituted for different gods took place. The temples or altars for these gods might be located at the other side of the city. But even if the stadium was near the temple, the link could be de-emphasized by focusing on the stadium. Thus according to the sixth-century Severus, when the Antiochenes lit torches and burned incense to celebrate the Olympics, they indeed did so in the stadium of Daphne.[41] The bishop was generally ready to complain about every pagan element he could identify, but at Daphne the inclusion of a Christian shrine and the destruction by fire of the great temple of Apollo had by the late fourth century already more or less depaganized the site. In Himerius' description of the Panathenaic procession at Athens (*Oration* 47), a distance from the temple is created – perhaps only stylistically, perhaps also historically – by not taking the procession up to the Acropolis. Himerius explains the shape of the ship and the mechanisms of moving it, he mentions priests and priestesses from traditional noble families, and sacred songs, but he does not mention anything happening in the temple on the Acropolis.[42] The procession stopped at the foot of the hill, from where, at least in Himerius' mind, Athena overlooked the festival. With the interjection οἶμαι, he expressed that this was his own perspective and acknowledged that not everyone still believed that Athena lived in that temple.

There is no reason to connect such small steps towards secularization with any specific law. Secularization was not automatically implemented as the imperial policy on paganism grew stricter. Eventually, every alteration had to be made on the local level. The *agones* never became feasts of a shrinking community of pagans, but belonged to the cities as a whole. The councilors and provincial administrators of the fourth and fifth centuries were a mixed group of pagans and Christians, the latter group increasingly predominating and successfully suggesting adaptations.

[41] Severus of Antioch, *Hom.* 95 (PO 25), 93. [42] *Or.* 47.12–17.

Although it was possible to detach a contest from a temple, certainly if there was a certain spatial separation between the two, it is unclear in how many cases this happened. The laws explaining that feasts were not to be affected by the closure of temples show that in some cases the link between a temple and its festivities was preserved throughout the fourth century. To really understand the extent of secularization, it is essential to know how often it happened that an *agon* continued when the temple had been closed, that *agon* and temple came to an end at the same time, or that the games stopped before the cultic activity in the temple had ended. Unfortunately for most agonistic festivals neither event has been dated with any precision.[43] For rural *agones*, the link between sanctuary and contest was definitely hard to get rid of completely, as here the proximity of the stadium to the temple – and to not much else – was most obvious. Certainly in a place such as Olympia the link with the pagan sanctuary was impossible to ignore.[44] That this sanctuary survived longer than many others has probably little to do with a higher level of secularization, but may have to be linked to its tremendous symbolic value for pagans and to its relative distance from a zealous Christian community.

Once altar and temple had lost their roles in the ceremonial and were no longer the physical focal point for the sacrality of the *agones*, the procession became the ceremonial climax of the feast. People walked together to the feast, in a happy atmosphere and festive costumes. With the more obvious pagan identifiers gone, some Christian authors try to establish all types of games as pagan on the basis of these processions. John Chrysostom, for example, repeatedly calls them "of the devil" (πομπαὶ σατανικαί).[45] He turns around the legal formulation that forbade pagan ritual but allowed games: if it was forbidden to enter a temple, it was even worse to go to a feast of Satan.[46] It is possible that, as a reaction to such objections, certain processions underwent some level of secularization. Traditionally, certain cultic objects were carried by the participants. Himerius, however, is conspicuously silent on the traditional *peplos* for the cult statue, and instead

[43] On the end of the temples in general: Emmel, Gotter, and Hahn 2008. On the poor state of 'abandonment history' in temple archaeology: Ward-Perkins 2011.

[44] The church excavated in Olympia did of course depaganize the site, but not while the games were still ongoing. It was, as many churches in or near pagan temples, built only after the temple had been abandoned for some time. See Sinn 1997: 216. See Emmel, Gotter, and Hahn 2008: 7–13 for general observations on the transition of temples to churches.

[45] References collected in Koch 2007a: 14–15.

[46] *Hom. 32 in Joannem* (PG 59) 188: Εἰ γὰρ ἐν εἰδωλείῳ οὐ θέμις εἰσιέναι, πολλῷ μᾶλλον εἰς ἑορτὴν σατανικήν.

focused on the wooden ship, an historical but not overtly cultic object.[47] In the circus the procession remained a major feature of the games in the Christian Byzantine Empire.[48]

A lack of knowledge and a lingering fear

In the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the position of paganism was further undermined. A decree of 392 banned the previously condoned offerings of incense or perfume to the gods. Around the same time, pagan priests lost their privileges, pagans were banned from imperial service, and the revenues of the temples were reverted to the imperial treasury.[49] As Christians had replaced pagans as the largest group within the Empire, cases of permitted violence against pagans seem to have become more common as well.[50] Such outbursts of violence were often linked to public events.[51]

One cannot observe any immediate consequences of this increasingly harsh anti-paganism on the state of the agonistic circuit circa 400. Though the circuit was in decline, some *agones* continued into the 420s and in a small number of cases even later. Many of the people involved in *agones* in this late period can be identified as Christians. The name of the two athletic Johns, a late fourth-century champion from Smyrna and a competitor depicted on contorniates from the second quarter of the fifth century, offers a clear indication that they came from a Christian family.[52] In Antioch even Christians who regularly attended the church went to Daphne for the Olympics.[53] An alytarch of the Ephesus Olympics circa 400 and Leontios, the urban prefect of Constantinople, who is said to have planned Olympic games in Chalcedon circa 435, can both be identified as Christians.[54] Whereas in the former case, our only evidence is a Christian symbol on a building inscription, there is no room for doubt regarding the latter: Leontios founded the Church of St. Demetrios in Thessalonica.[55]

[47] *Or*. 47.12–17. [48] See for example the circus programs P.Oxy. XXXIV 2707 and P.Bingen 128.

[49] Chuvin 1990: 63–103. *Cod. Theod*. 16.10.12 (392: about offerings), 16.10.14 (396: abolition of privileges for pagan priests), 19 and 20 (408, 415: revenues taken away), 21 (416: pagans not in imperial service).

[50] See Emmel, Gotter, and Hahn 2008: 5 with observations on localized conflicts between pagans and Christians. Discussions of examples in the rest of the volume and more briefly also in Chuvin 1990: 43–103 (*passim*).

[51] See e.g. *Cod. Theod*. 16.2.42–43 (which forbade the presence of the fanatic Alexandrian parabalani at spectacles and other public gatherings) or Augustine, *Ep*. 91 (which records a riot at Calama during a public celebration of the Kalends of June).

[52] CIL VI 10153 = IGUR I 245, Alföldi and Alföldi 1976: cat. nos. 458, 464.

[53] Palladius, *Dialogus de vita Joannis Chrysostomi* (SC 341) 16.102.

[54] IK Ephesos 447; Callinicus, *Vita Hypatii* (SC 177) 33. [55] Chuvin 1990: 85.

That numerous people at this point in history saw *agones* as purely secular should not be a surprise. Because the agonistic circuit was by now quite small and pervaded by Christians, and because the link with the temple was in certain cases no longer visible, considerable historical knowledge was required to understand why some preachers still considered these games pagan. Highly educated people such as John Chrysostom were sufficiently acquainted with Greek literature to understand certain pagan references in the feast, but for less educated Christians it would have been very difficult to understand how something so innocent and joyous as a festival could be sacrilegious. In the first half of the fifth century, Basil of Seleucia played with this contradiction between obvious joy and hidden sacrilege in a sermon on the Olympic games.[56] His particularly vague and redundant style, however, may not have helped many of his flock to understand why exactly this feast was pagan. Even for Christians who did know that a traditional feast had something to do with paganism, the religious background was not always clear, certainly not from the late fourth century onward. Palladius, John Chrysostom's biographer, described the Olympics as "one of the typically pagan feasts held every four years with *Herakleian* contests."[57] Whereas he seems to know of the traditional association between athletics and Herakles, he misses the far stronger connection of the Olympics with Zeus. Severus was better informed: he asked his flock whether they did not see that when they changed into a short tunic, took a stick and shaved, and then walked up to the spectacle in Daphne, they were part of a procession for Zeus.[58] For many the answer was no doubt in the negative. Because they did not have the same literary background as the bishop, they did not recognize the same religious resonances and did probably not know the origin of the feast. For them the typical outfit and route were probably something traditional and a bit picturesque, but not necessarily pagan.[59]

A lack of knowledge about what exactly an *agon* entailed is also a central feature in the only source reporting that group of Christians actually stopped the organization of an *agon*, namely the story on the Olympic games of Chalcedon in the *Life of Hypatios*.[60] An important official called Leontios, who can be identified as the Christian urban prefect of Constantinople around 435, is said to have wanted to introduce Olympic

[56] *Hom.* 27: Εἰς τὰ Ὀλύμπια (PG 85) 308–316.
[57] Palladius, *Dialogus de vita Joannis Chrysostomi* (SC 341) 16.102: μιᾶς τῶν παρὰ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἐπισήμων ἑορτῶν διὰ τετραετίας ἐπιτελουμένων τῶν Ἡρακλείων ἄθλων, Ὀλυμπίων καλουμένων
[58] *Hom.* 95 (PO 25), 94. [59] Cf. Cameron 2011: 794. [60] Callinicus, *Vita Hypatii* (SC 177) 33.

games in Chalcedon. Although his choice of games is remarkable – one expects circus races or *venationes* – his decision to organize games is just what a man in his position can be expected to do, for procuring games was a normal responsibility of Roman officials, which was already since the 340s perfectly acceptable for Christian laymen. The idea of holding Olympics may have been an attempt to impress the population with something new, but at the same time traditional – an 'invented tradition' in the terminology of Hobsbawm[61] – which conveniently would not cost Leontios a fortune (in comparison to circus races). What points to this interpretation is the fact that the games are presented as a reintroduction, although there were in fact no local Olympic games in Chalcedon before.

Thus far, we have seen opposition against games expressed mostly in the writing and sermons of members of the clergy, who thanks to their classical education could pinpoint the pagan remnants in the tradition. The writings of some senior members of the clergy, however, are not representative for the actions of all clergymen. In this case the local bishop Eulalios was, though not necessarily enthusiastic about the plan, apparently inclined to accept it. He is said to have told off the local monks who were complaining about it, as it was not their place to get involved in worldly matters. Negotiating with imperial magistrates was the responsibility of the bishop and each bishop did this job as he saw fit. In order to keep the peace Eulalios did not want to make a problem out of the connection with paganism. It was after all possible in the contemporary context to pass off the games as secular.

A group of monks, however, headed by the later Saint Hypatios, did not leave it at that. They threatened to go to the governor and harass him, afraid that the Christian crowd would worship idols out of ignorance if Olympics were introduced. Their negative attitude can best be explained as fear of the unknown: as the author explains, they had no idea where the danger hid itself, but just hearing the name of the contest suggested to them that there was danger. There were no other Olympic games left in the area about which Hypatios could have heard reports and it is unlikely that he had read about them; disapproving of Greek *paideia*, he is said to have left grammar school early to join a rural monastery.[62] Indeed, the author of his *Life* explicitly adds at the end of the story that Hypatios did not know what Olympics were and what exactly was their evil. A certain Eusebios had explained to him in a letter that they were a dreadful feast of Satan, a

[61] Hobsbawm 1983. [62] See Trombley 1993: II.76–96 on the background and life of Hypatios.

complete idol-madness, and a slippery path of destruction for Christians.[63] Evidently, this Eusebios (or the author of the *Life*) could not indicate the specific religious elements either.

Fear is a far stronger incentive than any intellectual objection. The explanation by Severus of Antioch that wearing the customary clothes was actually a pagan act would not stop Christians from doing it, precisely because the problem was well defined and seemed small. The better accustomed people were to the details of the event, the more harmless they seemed. In Chalcedon it was the undefined danger, the not knowing where to expect the pagan demons, that cast a frightening shadow in the imagination of the zealous monks. Until the late fourth century, such fear of the unknown barely existed in connection with athletics, as games were still relatively widespread. This was no longer the case, however, by the early fifth century.

In general the complaints of churchmen, for example about the pagan nature of the procession, were the same for all kinds of games,[64] but while circus races and *venationes* grew in popularity, the *agones* declined. Perhaps, the lingering shadow of paganism was a greater problem for the *agones* than for other games. Both Greek *agones* and games in the Roman tradition were originally put on to celebrate religious holidays and continued to celebrate religious occasions into late antiquity. If one looks at specific festivals, it was probably as difficult to secularize *Pythia* as *Saturnalia*. Here I do not want to focus on the secularization of the entire festival, however, but of the type of games put on for the occasion. Even though the secularization of specific Roman festivals with games may have been difficult, the secularization of *ludi circenses* or *venationes* was not. One just needed to remove the altars and priestly functions. Games could more easily be detached from their occasion with Roman festivals than with Greek. Throughout the centuries, the institution of each new athletic contest had represented the institution of a new festival by a city. Each contest/festival was called by its proper name (*Olympia, Pythia, Panathenaia, Paneia*, etc.). Individual athletic matches could be presented outside the context of a religious festival, but fully-fledged *agones* were normally not. The reason for this is not necessarily religious: the circuit followed a strict schedule that did not leave much room for flexibility. The early

[63] *Vita Hypatii* 33: Ἔλεγεν οὖν ὁ Εὐσέβειος οὗτος πάνδεινον εἶναι ἑορτὴν τοῦ σατανᾶ Ὀλύμπια καὶ πληρεστάτην εἶναι εἰδωλομανίαν καὶ τῶν χριστιανῶν ὄλισθον καὶ ἀπώλειαν· καὶ ἐκτίθεται αὐτῷ ἐν χάρτῃ τὴν διήγησιν.

[64] Weismann 1972: 98–103.

development of Roman-style games was centered in Rome: originally limited to certain holidays, the games were held for more and more days and for a growing number of occasions, no longer to celebrate only traditional religious festivals, but also military triumphs or imperial birthdays. The circus games and the shows in the amphitheater and the theater were put on by individual sponsors in any combination to liven up any kind of celebration, religious or secular, unlike an *agon* which always belonged to a particular religious festival. Unlike *agones*, Roman-style games were frequently announced with their generic terms (*ludi circenses, venatio*, etc.). Already in the second century, a tendency to prefer even more neutral terms such as *editio* or *voluptas* is noticeable.[65] These different terminological practices show that a conceptual separation between games and occasion was easier for the Roman-style games than for the *agones*. By the fifth century these games were definitely no longer perceived as pagan. At the council of Carthage in 419, the Church in principle forbade the attendance of spectacles for all Christians, but as the bishops realized that this was unrealistic, they focused in practice on keeping those people away who were linked to the Church, in this case the sons of bishops. The reason given is not the pagan origin of the games or any intrinsically pagan element of the event, but the fact that many people were cursing there.[66] In the early Byzantine period, the ritual of circus games started to include Christian elements, with the emperor making the sign of the Cross when he entered the circus, the factions praising God in their acclamations, and the charioteers thanking God for their victories.[67]

The *Olympia, Pythia*, or *Panathenaia* remained, even in the absence of sacrifices and pagan priests, onomastically linked to a god and chronologically to a pagan holiday. The pagan resonance in the name could actually frighten Christians. The early Byzantine erasure of the *Olympia* and *Pythia* from an imperial-age agonistic inscription from Aphrodisias shows that

[65] Chamberland 2012: 298.

[66] *Canon* 15 (CC SL 149): Manuscript tradition A (p. 105): *Et ut filii sacerdotum spectacula saecularia non tantum non exhibeant sed nec spectent licet. Et hoc semper christianis omnibus interdictum sit ut ubi blasphemia sunt non accedant*. Manuscript tradition B (p. 122): *De spectaculis: Et ut filii sacerdotum spectacula saecularia non tantum non exhibeant sed nec spectare eis liceat; hoc semper christianis omnibus interdictum sit ut ubi blasphemiae sunt omnino non accedant*. "And that the sons of bishops not only not present worldly spectacles, but it is even not allowed that they watch; (for) it has always been forbidden to all Christians to be where cursing is (all) around." DeVoe 1987: 168 considers the description *saecularis* proof that the games are no longer linked to idolatry at all, but, according to the Latin dictionary of Lewis and Short, this word can in ecclesiastical Latin as well mean 'secular' as 'heathen', so that argument should not be pushed.

[67] Cameron 1976: 152–53.

after the games had gone the threat embedded in the pagan name could still haunt people.[68] Getting rid of the pagan associations was not easy. Leontios' proposal to institute Olympics in Chalcedon was in fact a decent attempt. Being a Christian, Leontios would surely have had no intention to link the games to a temple of Zeus or any other pagan sanctuary.[69] Previously, Chalcedon's best-known games from the imperial period were *Pythia* and a true reinstitution would have preserved that name.[70] *Olympia*, however, occur more often in literature and are best represented among the *agones* that survived into the fifth century. Therefore, the name *Olympia* was probably meant to be generic, in the sense of 'an *agon*'. For the zealous monk Hypatios, however, the pagan ring was enough to protest, even though he did not really know anything about the event.

To put Christianity forward as a direct cause of the end of athletics is to suggest that Christianness was the constitutive principle upon which Christians continually acted in their everyday life. The tolerance of and interest in the *agones* on the part of some Christians even before the ban on sacrifices and on the part of an increasing number of them afterwards shows that this was not the case. Several little steps towards secularization, which would not have had much effect on the popularity of the games among pagans, made them more acceptable for Christians who did have some religious scruples. Nevertheless, hardliners on both sides of the religious spectrum continued to argue for the religious character of the *agones* in the fourth and fifth centuries. The need to repeat their criticisms again and again shows that they did not convince many. Some of the speeches and sermons, e.g. by Libanius or by Basil of Seleucia, were too stylized anyway to be understood by more than a fraction of the late-antique athletics fans. Certain hardliners knew they were fighting a losing battle: even though John Chrysostom repeatedly criticized the Olympic procession, he also assumed that many in his audience had often watched the contests with admiration.[71]

The problems of the late-antique agonistic circuit cannot all be blamed on the rise of Christianity. For many, being a Christian was perfectly compatible with watching, sponsoring, or competing in *agones*. That is not to say that Christianity had no role whatsoever in the decline of the agonistic circuit. This chapter has shown that, despite the removal of some obvious pagan elements, a consensus on the religious or secular nature of *agones* was never reached. Some members of society continued to oppose

[68] IAph2007 5.214. [69] Jiménez Sánchez 2013: 43–44 comes to the same conclusion.
[70] CIG 3676. [71] *Hom. 14 in epistulam ad Hebraeos* (PG 63) 116.

them: influential members of the clergy, zealous and genuinely scared monks, and probably also members of the lay elite, whose discussions with advocates of games led to adaptations made to the festivals and repeated requests for clarification of the anti-pagan laws. The next step in re-evaluating of the possibility that the agonistic circuit ended because of a religiously inspired ban is to investigate in the following chapter whether the emperor was influenced by the hardline position. Thus far we have investigated only late-antique laws on religion, which hardly mention *agones*. If we are to understand the position of the emperor within the ongoing discussion on the acceptability of games, all of the constitutions that mention games deserve attention.

CHAPTER 9

An imperial ban?

The emperor taking the initiative

Greek *agones* had always been a stage for the display of aristocratic excellence: by excelling in sports and by making benefactions in the sight of the assembled Greek world, people could distinguish themselves from their fellow citizens as well as from the rest of the world and convey a message of power.[1] Classical examples of aristocrats using the games as a political stage are Alcibiades, who used his Olympic successes as a winning argument in his campaign to be elected as leader of the Sicilian expedition, and the multiple victories and monuments of the Sicilian tyrants or of Philip of Macedon.[2] The Hellenistic monarchs, who often had even more resources at their disposal, followed in the footsteps of earlier aristocrats by sending horses and chariots for the races, by presiding over games, or by erecting monuments.[3] Some kings introduced their own festivals with games, particularly grand in comparison with traditional city festivals, and sent out embassies to announce these contests.[4] Contemporary Roman rulers followed their example. Aemilius Paullus, for example, celebrated his victory over Macedonia in 168 BC by organizing and presiding over games at Amphipolis, to which he invited guests from across the Greek-speaking world.[5]

Roman emperors did not maintain the traditional aristocratic habit of participating in the competition. The emperor was supreme in power and

[1] E.g. Hönle 1972, Fantuzzi 2005: 262–63, Nicholson 2005. An earlier version of this chapter is published as Remijsen 2014.

[2] Thucydides 6.15–16 and Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 11 on Alcibiades. For the Sicilians see Hönle 1972: 106–18 and Antonaccio 2007: 265–85; for Philip see Moretti 1957: nos. 434, 439, and 445 and Plutarch, *Alexander* 3.8; 4.9.

[3] Examples in Remijsen 2009a: 261. For royal presidencies see e.g. Diodorus 19.64 on Kassander at the *Nemea*.

[4] E.g. the festival of Ptolemy II in Alexandria (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* V 196 A – 203 B) or that organized by Antiochos IV at Daphne (Polybius 30.25–26).

[5] Livy 45.32.

did not need to advertise his primacy. Because he had no equal competitors, he had nothing to win at the games, only his dignity to lose. Tiberius did win the Olympic race for four-horse chariots, but at the latest in AD 1, when he was not yet emperor, and so did his adoptive son Germanicus in 17.[6] The real exception is Nero, who competed both as *kithara*-singer and as charioteer during a grand tour through Greece in 67, for which all the games of the *periodos* had to be rescheduled so that they occurred shortly after one another. His participation in the Olympics offered a sorry spectacle: he fell from his chariot but was nevertheless proclaimed victor.[7]

The emperors did continue the habit of presiding over Greek *agones* in order to promote themselves as committed leaders. This is best attested in Italy, particularly for the Neapolitan *Sebasta* in the first century, and for Rome after the introduction of the *Kapitolia* in 86.[8] On their journeys the emperors presided over eastern *agones*.[9] Only rarely, however, did emperors propose a new contest dedicated to a specific god, or did they provide funds from the imperial treasury. Indications of such active imperial involvement exist only for the *agones* in Rome or in cities which had particular political and/or emotional significance. After the battle at Actium, for example, Augustus built the victory town Nikopolis and introduced quadrennial victory games, the *Aktia*.[10] Hadrian played an active role in Athens and in Antinoopolis, the city he founded for his deceased and deified favorite Antinous.[11]

The imperial presidencies were a form of euergetism. By paying for prizes and other aspects of festivities, emperors allowed the people to share in their wealth and demonstrated their benevolence and love. They moreover made themselves available to the people and allowed them to present petitions. People had the opportunity to air their grievances at the games,

[6] Tiberius won before he was adopted by Augustus (AD 4), see IvO 220. Cf. SEG XXII 385. For Germanicus see Eusebius, *Chronica* Ol.199 (ed. Christesen and Martirosova-Torlone 2006) and IvO 221.

[7] Suetonius, *Nero* 24; Tacitus, *Annales* 14.14; Cassius Dio 63.10.14 and 19.

[8] Augustus: Suetonius, *Augustus* 98.5; Velleius Paterculus 2.123.1; Claudius: Suetonius, *Claudius* 11.2; Titus: I.Napoli I 20 = IG XIV 729. See Miranda 1988: 222–26; Domitian introducing the *Kapitolia*: Suetonius, *Domitianus* 4; Herodian 1.9.2–3.

[9] E.g. Hadrian: *Historia Augusta, Hadrianus* 13; Cassius Dio 69.16.1. See Follet 1976: 348. Septimius Severus: Ziegler 1985: 22–25, 33–34, and 75–85.

[10] Suetonius, *Augustus* 18.2; Strabo 7.7.6. The *Sebasta* in Naples are often connected with Augustus as well, but there are no indications that these games were the emperor's own idea. According to Cassius Dio 55.10.9 the people of Naples wanted to honor their emperor to thank him for the financial help they had received after an earthquake.

[11] Hadrian was as founder and promoter of the *Panhellenion* certainly involved in the institution of the *Panhellenia* (Cassius Dio 69.16.2). See Spawforth and Walker 1985: 90. Follet 1976: 348 has suggested that Hadrian may also have donated the agonistic fund for the *Hadrianeia*. For Antinoopolis see Zahrnt 1988: 696.

but foremost to show their love with cheers and acclamations. Games could create "a feeling of reconciliation and harmony between political power and the people" and thus the emperor would have felt morally obliged to be personally involved in them.[12] This could be achieved at all kinds of games, however, not just at *agones*.

In the late third century emperors still saw the benefits of presiding over *agones*. The last of the soldier emperors, Carinus, is said to have distributed prizes to artists and athletes during extravagant shows in Rome, which included Greek-style demonstration matches.[13] Diocletian did the same during his alytarchy of the Antiochene Olympics, and when he attended *ad hoc* games in his honor in Alexandria.[14] For the fourth century evidence for personal involvement is scarce. Constantine may have organized an *agon* in Constantinople to celebrate its foundation and Julian was expected by Libanius to attend the Antiochene Olympics, but the emperor died before these took place.[15] Again according to Libanius, he did organize athletic games for his army near Ctesiphon, but it is not entirely clear whether this classicizing reference to Alexander was part of Julian's plan or represents a literary exaggeration.[16] In general, Julian was not a great enthusiast of watching games; he looked down on the useless physical prowess of athletes.[17] Most references to athletics in his work are metaphorical. There is no other evidence for fourth-century emperors as presidents. The Armenian prince Varazdates participated in the Olympics, but it is unclear whether his victory promoted the power of the Roman court or of the Armenian kingdom in any way.

It is impossible to deduce from this silence of the sources whether the emperors stopped attending *agones* entirely, as our information is far from complete and the *agones* became ever scarcer. There is, on the other hand, good evidence for late-antique emperors presiding over and attending Roman-style games, even in the East, which suggests that attending these games was a higher priority for the emperors.[18] Although most imperial

[12] Quote from Garello 1997: 102–03. See also Cameron 1976: 157–92.

[13] *Historia Augusta, Carus et Carinus et Numerianus* 19. Since Carus and Numerianus were not in Rome, the main organizer must have been Carinus. It is not clear from the report, which is in fact a description of a painting about the games, whether Carinus personally handed the prizes to the victors.

[14] Malalas 12.38; 44 (ed. Thurn 2000); SB III 6222 (cf. Remijsen 2010a: 186–87).

[15] *Patria Konstantinoupoleos* 1.62 (ed. Preger 1907); Libanius, *Ep.* 1180.

[16] Libanius, *Or.* 1.133.

[17] Cf. Bouffartigue 1992: 498–99.

[18] E.g. Ammianus Marcellinus 14.5.1 (Constantius in Arles); 14.11.12 (Gallus in Constantinople); 16.10.13 (Constantius in Rome); 21.1.4 (Julian in Vienne); 21.6.3 (Constantius in Antioch); 21.10.2 (Julian in Sirmium).

involvement in games in the eastern Mediterranean is linked to *agones* before 300, it would be wrong to assume that emperors had ever preferred *agones* over Roman-style games as occasions for imperial self-promotion. In most cases presiding over *agones* had represented a negative choice. For a long time, they had few other options in the East of the Empire. Here *agones* were the most popular games in the cities, so when an emperor wanted to preside over the main festival of a city, he ended up at an *agon*. Only in Antioch and Alexandria were circus games popular before the fourth century. Even here Diocletian presided over *agones*, in the case of Antioch probably because the Olympics happened to take place that year and had more symbolic value for the city. His choice may also have stemmed from a personal interest, though. According to the somewhat fanciful report of one of the competitors at the quickly organized *ad hoc* games in Alexandria, the emperor personally decided to add an extra event.[19] In late antiquity emperors were no longer resigned to the quasi-monopoly of *agones* in the East. The tetrarchs and later emperors resided for longer periods in major cities other than Rome and organized these cities as capitals. These new tetrarchic capitals all received, after the example of Rome, a palace connected to a circus.[20] Where an emperor resided, the entertainment sector thus bloomed.[21] The popularity of these new circuses in turn defined the fashion for the smaller cities in the neighborhood.

In the West imperial presidencies and institutions of *agones* had represented a positive choice. In the capital emperors could organize and attend all kinds of games. According to the calendar of 354, 177 holidays were annually celebrated with Roman-style games.[22] The three *agones*, which most likely all survived at this date, are not even mentioned on this calendar, since they were celebrated only once every four years. When the emperor, with so many other options, attended these *agones*, he tried to do something high-cultured. Usually, however, he presided over *ludi*. In the fourth century the emperor as president of games even became an iconographical motif, e.g. on diptychs or on the Theodosian basis of the obelisk in the circus of Constantinople.[23] For several reasons, circus games had more potential for propaganda than *agones*. There was a long tradition of celebrating imperial holidays in the circus. Circus shows had been put

[19] SB III 6222. [20] Cameron 1976: 180–81.

[21] *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* 32 (SC 124): *Habes ergo Antiochiam quidem in omnibus delectabilibus abundantem, maxime autem circensibus. Omnia autem quare? Quoniam ibi imperatorem sedet, necesse est omnia propter eum.* "You have Antioch, indeed abundant in all entertainments on top of the circus. But why all this? Because there the emperor resides, and it all is necessary because of him."

[22] Salzman 1990: 120. [23] Puk 2012: 142.

on in Rome since the early Principate for imperial birthdays and accession days. Imperial family feasts, for example celebrating the birth of an heir to the throne, occasioned shows as well. The celebration of these anniversaries and family feasts promoted the continuity and legitimacy of power, while games for military victories stressed the efficiency of power. The consuls' assumption of office, another annual reason for circus games, highlighted the ancient institutions the Empire was based on.[24] This type of messages was harder to convey by means of an *agon*. Although many *agones* were connected to the imperial cult, they conveyed a message of loyalty rather than power. By his benefactions an emperor still conveyed a certain image of power, but this was only a vague image. An emperor could not personalize the propaganda, because the festival was held on a fixed day and place, which was traditional for the city, and it incorporated local traditions. It has been argued that *agones* were "too marginal, temporally and spatially, to serve as a focal point of imperial rituals."[25] The rigid framework of customs stopped the emperor from putting an accent on the continuity, legitimacy, efficiency, or institutional basis of power in the way he could with circus games. The only way to express a particular message by means of an *agon* was to found a contest and personally design its program, as Ptolemy II, Antiochos IV, or Augustus had done in the past. There are, however, only few examples of imperial institutions.

Presiding over circus games was furthermore a better way of working oneself into the picture than presiding over an *agon*, because one generally spent more – and the more one spent, the more impressive the benefaction was. Moreover, no one stole the president's glory. *Agones* were a community project: the president, other officials, xystarchs, priests, and the competitors all belonged to the elite and got part of the glory. The contestants of circus games were of course also objects of admiration, but they were of a different social status, and therefore did not compete for the same kind of glory as the president.

Another benefit of circus games was their scale and the monumentality of their location. Many circuses had been donated by the emperor. A large circus was too expensive as a building project for most cities, which relied on private benefactors. Therefore, the emperor had as donator of a circus less competition than as a donator of stadia. In a circus, moreover, emperors could engage in a relation with a larger proportion of the population.

[24] Heucke 1995: 185–93.

[25] Lim 1997: 174–75 says this about the Antiochene Olympics in the early sixth century, but this is equally applicable to earlier periods and other games.

Whereas an imperial-age stadium could seat circa 10,000 people, a modest circus could have room for twice that number, and the largest circuses for almost 100,000 spectators or even more.[26] In large cosmopolitan cities such as Antioch, a circus could harbor up to half of the population, while a stadium could fit perhaps only 5 percent.[27] When emperors had the choice, they would always prefer the games with most propagandistic value.

The emperor granting games

Thus far, only the active personal involvement of rulers has been discussed, in particular their roles as founders and presidents. In comparison with the Hellenistic rulers, Roman emperors were personally not that engaged and took relatively little initiative. By far the largest part of the imperial role on the agonistic circuit was reactive.[28] This does not reflect a lack of interest, but is simply how the Empire worked. The emperor addressed problems as they were brought to his attention: individual citizens, delegations of guilds, embassies from cities, or provincial assemblies all petitioned governors and the court with requests and complaints, and magistrates asked their superiors or the emperor himself for advice when a conflict brought to light a lacuna in the law.[29] The reactive nature of policy is also fundamental for understanding the role of the emperor in the demise of the games.

In the Hellenistic period cities started to ask the king's permission for the construction of a gymnasium or the organization of games.[30] *Agones*

[26] Estimates for stadia range from 1,500 to 40,000 (Golden 2004: 158), but those estimated at more than 15,000 are all stadia without stone seats (e.g. the Hellenistic stadium of Isthmia, Olympia), which were increasingly rare in the imperial period. The imperial-age stadium of Delphi, which had an average size for Greece and was slightly smaller than those in the East, has been estimated at 6,500 spectators (Aupert 1979: 75). The medium-sized circuses of Leptis Magna and Tyre could seat between 20,000 and 30,000 people (Humphrey 1986: 31, 468), but the Circus Maximus could seat 150,000 at the time of Augustus and the seating capacity of the Antioch circus is estimated at 80,000 (Humphrey 1986: 76, 447).

[27] Liebeschuetz 1972: 92–100 estimates the population of Antioch in the range of 150,000 to 300,000 inhabitants.

[28] See Spawforth 2007: 378–79 for the distinction between a proactive and reactive imperial attitude towards athletics. He considers the emperors more proactive than I would, taking the third-century upsurge of games as a sign of active involvement. The military campaigns indeed stimulated the institution of new games, but there is no proof that emperors proposed these. Cities were more likely to want high-status games and to send embassies when the emperor was near and had already been generous to other cities and certainly if he was in need of their assistance. The emperor was, moreover, more likely to grant the request if he needed the city's help or if he was grateful.

[29] Central thesis of Millar 1977: esp. 375–85. See also Harl 1987: 22–24.

[30] E.g. Jason's request for permission from Antiochos IV to build a gymnasium in Jerusalem (1 *Maccabees* 1.14), the grant of games to the new *polis* Ptolemais by an ambassador of Ptolemy III (OGIS I 49 and 51), or the institution of an *agon* on the island of Icarus by the Seleucid official Ikadion, at the request of Antiochos III (SEG XXXV 1476).

became, in other words, an instrument to express adherence to a king. Allied cities started to name their new games after the king, e.g. the *Basileia, Ptolemaia, Antigoneia*, or *Eumeneia*.[31] The agonistic success of the king's subjects became ideologically linked to the royal power, in the same way as it was linked to the power of the cities.[32] When large parts of the Greek world came under Roman rule, cities expressed their loyalty by naming their games, instead of after a monarch, after a personification of Rome: from the early second century BC on games called *Rhomaia* and games adding καὶ Ῥωμαῖα to their original name became common in Greece and Asia Minor.[33] From the first century AD on many *agones* incorporated the imperial cult. Games named after an emperor (e.g. *Sebasta* or *Hadrianeia*) were instituted in his honor, usually already before his formal deification. Games with an extra imperial title (e.g. *Olympia Severeia*) were held in honor of a god as well as the emperor. In most *agones*, even those not dedicated to him, a statue of the emperor was carried around in the procession.[34] Although the initiative for the institution came from the local level, an imperial fiat was asked and consequently games were considered an imperial gift or δωρεά.[35] Each request to the emperor was a message of loyalty: it made it known to the court that the emperor was honored.

Several successful embassies requesting games or a status upgrade are recorded in inscriptions. The earliest known example commemorates the introduction of the eiselastic *Traianeia Deiphileia* in Pergamon toward the end of Trajan's reign. Trajan referred the request to the senate, but after the senate had approved it, he himself issued the edict.[36] Miletus asked Marcus Aurelius and Commodus for an upgrade to eiselastic status of the *Didymeia*, an *agon* that was instituted as a stephanitic contest around 200 BC. The eiselastic status was granted by the emperor and confirmed by the senate. The games were renamed *Didymeia Kommodeia* as a sign of gratitude to the emperor and his son, who had recently been promoted to

[31] For *Basileia*, see e.g. IAG 40, 42, 44, for *Ptolemaia*, e.g. IAG 40, SEG XLIII 68, for *Antigoneia*, e.g. IAG 45, and for *Eumeneia*, e.g. IK Ephesos 1082, IG II^2 2459.

[32] A good illustration of this is an inscription from Teos published in Herrmann 1965: 38 (ll. 46–49): local victors of stephanitic games crowned the statue of Antiochos III upon their arrival home.

[33] Moretti 1953: 137–38.

[34] Price 1984: 102–07; Edelmann 2008: 156.

[35] IAph2007 12.924–930: ἐπὶ τῇ δεδομένῃ τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἀγῶνος δωρεᾷ; P.Oxy. IX 1202: ἐκ τῆς τῶν [κυρί]ων Σεουήρου καὶ μεγάλου Ἀντωνίνου [δω]ρεᾶς τοῦ τῶν ἐφήβων ἀγῶνος. Cf. Pap.Agon. 7: τοῦ <ἀγῶνος τοῦ> δωρηθέντος ἡμῖν ὑπὸ τῆς θείας μεγαλοδωρ[είας τοῦ κυρίου] ἡμῶν Γαλλιηνοῦ Σεβαστοῦ; Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 6.2: *donatam Pythico agone*.

[36] IvP 269. Cf. Abbott and Johnson 1926: no. 73 and Herrmann 1975: 157–58.

Augustus.[37] An inscription from Thyateira honors the ambassador G. Perelius Aurelius Alexander, who obtained imperial permission from Elagabalus to establish the ἱερὸς ἀγὼν εἰσελαστικὸς Αὐγούστειος ἰσοπύθιος.[38]

Such grants of *agones* enabled the emperors to maintain good relations with the cities. The emperor benefitted from the grant, as during the festival his power would be visually celebrated in the city. At the same time an emperor could please the cities he needed and thank those that had helped him with the award of new high-status games. Ziegler and Wallner have shown that the institution of new games often coincided with military activity in the region. This is particularly clear in third-century Asia Minor and Syria, where problems with the Persians or competitors to the throne often raised the need for military action. Cities where the emperor resided during a campaign and cities that had chosen the right side in a conflict between aspiring emperors were duly rewarded with the right to hold sacred games.[39] This relation also worked the other way around: when a city had shown disloyalty, an emperor could prohibit their games.[40]

The high number of new games attested in inscriptions up to the late third century suggests that there was a flow of delegations to the court requesting them and that the emperors in general reacted positively. The last known grant of a contest was by Tacitus in Perge.[41] There is no evidence for new contests from the tetrarchy onward: the lack of civic coins and victory lists of athletes now obscures the granting process. The circumstances that may have affected the cities' eagerness to request new games will be addressed in Chapter 12; here the main question is whether late-antique emperors, faced with such a request, would still have been willing to grant it.

A parallel from the West shows that Constantine indeed saw the political advantages of a grant of games. Circa 334 he granted a request from Hispellum in Umbria for the introduction of games with theater plays and gladiator shows. Just as for the introduction of *agones*, the initiative for provincial games in the Roman style came from the local elite. Since the creation of the district *Tuscia et Umbria* under Diocletian, the imperial priest of Hispellum had been obliged to go every two years to Volsinii in Tuscia to celebrate games. The competition between the two

[37] Herrmann 1975 and 1988.
[38] IGR IV 1251 = TAM V 1018, IGR IV 1252 = TAM V 1019. Cf. Robert 1937: 119–23.
[39] Ziegler 1985: 67–119; Wallner 1997: 231; Spawforth 2007: 378–79.
[40] E.g. *Historia Augusta, Marcus Antoninus* 25; Herodian 3.6.9; *Historia Augusta, Severus* 9.
[41] IK Perge 331–336.

towns, which had previously each been the first city of their own region, inspired the people of Hispellum to ask for their own imperial temple and games. Constantine awarded these on condition that they would not be "defiled by the errors of a contagious superstition."[42] This probably implied a local ban on sacrifices.

The rescript reveals Constantine's main concerns when faced with a request for games: the traditional political consideration of how he could improve his relations with the city and – a completely new element – the religious doubt whether the pagan rituals of the imperial cult were an acceptable way to do this. It should be observed that, despite the clear pagan origins of the imperial cult, Christians generally reacted mildly to it. They objected only to pagan sacrifices, not to all rituals honoring the emperor. Constantine evidently decided that the political considerations trumped the religious argument. When the ritual was toned down, he had no more religious objections and politically the cult with its games remained interesting. He hence not only granted the games to Hispellum, but also insisted that the games at Volsinii continue annually, in this way doubling the imperial cult in the region. This decision does not stand alone. Throughout his reign Constantine actively promoted the imperial cult: he made his father *divus*, depicting his rise to heaven on coins, and authorized the cult of himself and his sons. Constantine's successors took over his secular interpretation of the imperial cult. Therefore, the description of the emperor as *divus* survived throughout the fourth century, and priests of the cult, such as *flamines* or *coronati*, still existed when the Empire was largely Christianized.[43] Only in the fifth century does the imperial cult seem to become more problematic in some areas, though in Africa imperial priests, now all Christian laymen, existed until the early sixth century.[44]

For Constantine's successors political arguments similarly trumped religious scruples when it came to games. In 342 some notables in Rome asked for clarification of the purpose of an earlier law on the closure of temples, out of fear that this would endanger their games. Constantius and Constans answered the urban prefect that temples outside city walls should be spared, precisely because *ludi*, circus games, and *agones* often originated

[42] CIL IX 5265, ll. 46–47: *contagios(a)e superstitionis fraudibus polluatur*. For a commentary on this text, see e.g. Van Dam 2007: 23–34.

[43] IK Ephesos 43. Bowersock 1983 gives an excellent historical overview of the characteristics of the imperial cult, esp. 174–82 for the Christian perspective on this cult. Also Markus 1990: 108–09. For more recent work on emperor worship in general, see e.g. Gradel 2002.

[44] Chastagnol and Duval 1974.

from these.[45] Games made people happy and compliant, and hence should not be endangered. The last scion of the Constantinian dynasty may have briefly returned to a religious interpretation of games. In his literary works, he certainly connects *agones* with pagan gods,[46] but we have no constitutions from his reign that can show whether this vision was translated into his actual policy.

The continuing potential of *agones* for the upkeep of good relations between city and emperor is visible in the statuary program of Delphi. The Delphians erected two statues for Constantine within the sanctuary and statues for either Dalmatius or Constantine II and for Constans on the Roman agora at the main gate of the sanctuary.[47] Later they honored Valens and Valentinian I (364–375) too as benefactors with a monument on the Roman agora.[48] As it is unlikely that Christian emperors gave extra money for the cult in the temple, the monuments may well have been linked to support of the games. That the preferred spot for imperial statues shifted in the 330s from the inside of the sanctuary to the outside might be a minor intervention to comply with the religious sensitivities of the imperial house. The adaptations to the ceremonial discussed in the previous chapter must have been essential for the open imperial support of a secular interpretation of games.

From the Valentinian dynasty there is stronger evidence of the imperial support of *agones*. In 369 a contest in Constantinople was reintroduced with the support of Valens.[49] In 376 the Carthaginians asked permission for the restoration of their athletic games.[50] Valens, Gratian, and Valentinian II permitted this to promote the happiness of the people. In this constitution, one finds no reference to religion at all. As mentioned before, however, the court continued to receive questions about the exact intent of the closure of temples, because of the discord within local communities on how to interpret the rule between strict Christians

[45] *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.3 (342 or 346): *Idem aa. ad Catullinum praefectum Urbi. Quamquam omnis superstitio penitus eruenda sit, tamen volumus, ut aedes templorum, quae extra muros sunt positae, intactae incorruptaeque consistant. Nam cum ex nonnullis vel ludorum vel circensium vel agonum origo fuerit exorta, non convenit ea convelli, ex quibus populo Romano praebeatur priscarum sollemnitas voluptatum*. "Although all superstition must be completely eradicated, nevertheless, it is our will that the buildings of the temples situated outside the walls shall remain untouched and uninjured. For since certain *ludi* or circus games or *agones* derive their origin from some of these temples, such structures shall not be torn down, since from them is provided the regular performance of long-established amusements for the Roman people." Translation adapted from Pharr 1952: 472.

[46] Julian, *Or.* 11.41–42 (no. Budé).

[47] Vatin 1962: 229–35; Weir 2004: 97–99.

[48] Vatin 1962: 238–41; Weir 2004: 97–99.

[49] Jerome, *Eusebii Caesariensis Chronicon. Hieronymi continuato* A. 369 (ed. Helm 1956).

[50] *Cod. Theod.* 15.7.3.

advocating the end of all pagan practices and conservative laymen, either pagan or Christian, wanting to preserve local traditions.[51] The lack of any reference to religion in this particular constitution may signal how established the secular interpretation of games was at court by now. In legal texts one can now also observe a preference for neutral terms to denote games, such as *editio, spectaculum*, or *voluptas*.[52]

The emperor as wise administrator

When the Hellenistic kings took up the role of supervisor over the *agones* in their sphere of influence, this went further than the grant of new games. Just as cities did, kings granted privileges to victors and acknowledged games that were announced by foreign embassies, but unlike *polis* decrees, royal decisions affected their entire territory. Because *agones* had spread to the entire eastern Mediterranean, however, no Hellenistic king had authority over all the games. Cities retained an important role in the acknowledgement of the status of a contest and the grant of privileges to victors. Marc Antony's letter to the *koinon* of the Asian Greeks shows that when areas came under Roman rule, these new magistrates were now asked to guarantee the privileges for victors.[53] Although technically this letter guaranteed privileges only for the *hieronikai* of Asia, they may have been valid in the whole area under his influence. As supervisors of athletics Roman rulers could have more impact than their royal predecessors. This was certainly true from the late first century BC on, when the temporary magistrates were replaced by monarchs. While the emperors were personally less active on the agonistic circuit than the rulers of the Hellenistic period, their supervisory role became greater.[54] Roman emperors acted as mediator between cities and competitors, the two main actors of the agonistic circuit, who sometimes had contrasting wishes. Cities sent delegations to the emperor with various petitions: they requested approval of their plans to introduce games, asked for their status to be secured, negotiated a special treatment if they had trouble paying pensions to athletes, or complained about new contests of other cities because these stole away their participants. Athletes equally sent diverse requests regarding their privileges: to inquire from which date they could be claimed, to complain when they were not paid properly, etc.[55] Usually emperors gave

[51] Cf. *Cod. Theod*. 16.10.8 (382), 16.10.17 (399). [52] Soler 2008: 43–52. [53] Ebert 1987.
[54] Pleket 2010: 197 calls the emperor "financial controller and 'brakeman'."
[55] Millar 1977: 456–63 on the relations between the emperor and the synods of athletes and performing artists.

answers or solutions one problem or even one individual case at a time.[56] For some major problems, however, the emperors developed more structural solutions. By categorizing and rescheduling the emperors created a structure that allowed the agonistic circuit to expand and made the agonistic explosion possible.

Firstly, the emperors made the categorization of *agones* uniform. Ptolemy II had introduced the custom of asking cities to acknowledge that the announced games were equal to one of the big four contests (e.g. 'isolympic'), which implied that the acknowledging cities would award their local victors the same privileges as victors of the contest it was modeled after. This innovation contributed to the development of the category of 'stephanitic' games: this became a quality label for *agones* that many cities from now on strived for. In the Hellenistic period each city (or league, or kingdom) individually chose whether to accept the stephanitic status of a contest or not. Consequently, each place had a different list of games that it considered stephanitic. The Hellenistic categorization system for games can thus be called subjective.[57] Kings could make the agonistic circuit more uniform only within the limits of their own sphere of influence. By the first century BC the Roman sphere of influence was already far greater than that of any kingdom. Marc Antony's decisions could affect the entire agonistic circuit, with the exception of Egypt. The beginning of the Empire still represents a major break, however, because after the battle of Actium the whole area in which Greek athletics was practiced fell for the first time under a single authority. Cities stopped the tedious negotiations on the status of their games with each city, league, or kingdom, and instead went directly to the court.

It is not clear when exactly this change happened, as there is little evidence for the first century AD, but from the reign of Trajan at the latest the status of new games or a status upgrade of existing games was systematically requested from the emperor. The emperors either did not permit the games to be held, or they permitted them without granting them a status, or they permitted them and granted the status of 'sacred contest'. This label had become an objective category: one could compile a single list of sacred games agreed upon by cities and athletes. In the reign of Trajan, the system of categorization was, in addition, further refined. The number of sacred games was continuously growing and the possible range of rewards (free meals, regular allowances for food, a once-only sum of

[56] E.g. Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 1, passim; *Cod. Iust.* 8.16.5; W.Chr. 158; P.Oxy. LI 3611.
[57] Remijsen 2011: 103–07.

money, statues, a festive entry into the city, honorary seats, etc.) was great and varied between cities. To bring more clarity, the category of the sacred games was subdivided into normal sacred games, for which a victor received exemption from civic obligations such as taxes and liturgies, and eiselastic sacred games (ἀγῶνες ἱεροὶ (καὶ) εἰσελαστικοί), for which a victor could expect, on top of the usual privileges, a festive entry in the city and a monthly allowance.[58] As a result the two rewards that cost the city most were now limited to a smaller group of contests.

Likewise in the reign of Trajan or perhaps slightly earlier, a categorizing term was introduced for games that were not sacred, which before had never constituted a clearly defined category. In the late first century, however, the terms 'talent games' (ἀγὼν ταλαντιαῖος) or 'thematic games' (ἀγὼν θεματικός) start to appear in agonistic inscriptions. Both terms are mainly attested in the second century and are sometimes combined, but 'talent games' is more frequent. Ταλαντιαῖος and also ἡμιταλαντιαῖος is obviously derived from a talent, that is 6,000 drachmas. The role of this talent is unclear, however, as the only talent contest for which we have detailed financial information was based on a cash fund providing a quadrennial budget of more than 5 talents and offered cash prizes which each amounted to less than a talent.[59] Θεματικός (rarely θεματίτης, in southern Asia Minor typically θέμις) is derived from θέμα, 'a sum of money that is laid down', perhaps as a prize, perhaps as a cash fund.

This system of categories helped to keep the agonistic circuit in check. It is impossible to determine whose idea it was originally: perhaps it was proposed by the athletic association, or by a city instituting a new contest, or it was developed at court. Important is that the emperor recognized the problem: the demands for more contests and privileges caused a constantly increasing financial pressure. When requesting a new contest cities added a financial plan to their proposal. When the court decided who did or did not receive a particular status, these financial arrangements of the contest were taken into account. One inscription gives us the exact wording of an

[58] Pliny, *Ep*. 10.118–119 (AD 111), asked Trajan for advice to solve a conflict between athletes and cities concerning the allowances for victors of the eiselastic games. This unique document was probably written a few years after the introduction of this category. The athletes claimed their money from the moment they had received the crown and for all victories in games that were currently eiselastic, even if they had obtained them before this status had been granted. Trajan, however, answered that the privileges were only valid from the moment they had made their festive return home and could be claimed only if the contest was eiselastic at the time of their victory.

[59] The contest from the will of Flavius Lysimachus was called 'ταλαντιαῖος'. IAph2007 12.538: budget of 31,839 denarii; 11.21: prizes ranging from 200 to 2,500 denarii.

imperial grant for minor games, the *Demostheneia* at Oenoanda.[60] After a brief word of praise for Demosthenes' *philotimia* and a formal confirmation of the games, Hadrian quickly comes to his main consideration for giving his fiat: "Demosthenes will contribute the cost from his own treasuries."[61] As long as the finances were settled, the emperor would not object.

Another structural intervention of an emperor, in this case of Hadrian, was the reorganization of the calendar.[62] In 134, while attending the *Sebasta* at Naples, Hadrian received complaints from several cities and provinces. The introduction of many new games, in particular in his own reign, had created overlaps in the calendar, which caused practical problems for both cities and competitors. The emperor therefore moved several games around in the four-year schedule, taking into account the travel time so that athletes could take part in all major games. The contests were now grouped more or less regionally. Not all changes to the calendar should be attributed to Hadrian – some might be earlier – but Hadrian apparently made the most systematic attempt.

The concern with structuring and finances sometimes clashed with the propagandistic benefits of imperial grants, particularly in the third century. From an economic perspective, an emperor could not hand out sacred status too lightly, as every new contest created new sacred victors, that is a group of, usually relatively well-to-do, citizens on whom towns could not rely for liturgies. Every new eiselastic contest represented new allowances to be paid. From a political perspective, however, these high statuses were the most effective means of favoring a particular city. The high number of new games attested in inscriptions shows that up to the late third century there was a flow of delegations to the court requesting them and that the emperors in general reacted positively. While in the second century the stability of the imperial power induced emperors to grant *agones* with moderation, the political turmoil of the third century made emperors more ready to please. The strategic importance of a city often overshadowed financial considerations, which led to an oversupply of high-status games and consequently to an inflation of the value of 'sacred status'. When even a one-time victor of the ephebic games of Oxyrhynchus could call himself a *hieronikes*, the group of men the city could not nominate for its many essential services had become very large indeed.

[60] See also P.Oxy. IV 705, a petition for ephebic games, and P.Oxy. IX 1202, where these games are explicitly called a gift of Septimius Severus and Caracalla.
[61] Wörrle 1988: 4, ll. 4–5. Translation from Mitchell 1990: 183.
[62] Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 2. See also Gouw 2008 and 2009: 17–95; Strasser 2010.

The rapid expansion of the circuit in the third century therefore endangered its stability.

Priorities seem to have changed under the tetrarchs.[63] The positive and traditional role of the emperor as wise administrator of the agonistic circuit is reflected in Menander Rhetor's contemporary advice for students of rhetoric to praise emperors, because, thanks to them, shows, feasts, and contests were conducted not only with proper splendor but also with due moderation.[64] Diocletian's policy shows a strong interest in finances, no doubt under influence of the contemporary hyperinflation. This concern is detectable in his currency decree or his edict on maximum prices, but likewise in his laws on athletics. Diocletian and his colleagues seem to have taken their role as supervisors of the athletic circuit more seriously than their predecessors. When a city in Caria asked (*post factum*) permission for the use of money from an agonistic fund for the restoration of a city wall, Diocletian and his colleagues gladly permitted this – rebuilding a city wall could hardly be called a luxury – but they did insist that the games had to be celebrated again as soon as the walls were finished.[65] By a law from the years 293–305 Diocletian and his fellow emperors limited the exemption from personal civic duties to professional competitors – the criterion for professionalism being the length of their career – who had competed honestly and became triple *hieronikai*, with at least one sacred contest in Rome or in ancient Greece.[66] This constitution improved the stability of the agonistic circuit, because it lifted some of the financial pressure of the cities by no longer exempting from liturgies the group of citizens who had never even competed professionally.

Several texts bear witness to imperial decisions on financial issues regarding games in the later fourth century. Claudius Mamertinus, appointed by Julian as consul in 362, praised the emperor for restoring

[63] For another discussion of Diocletian's involvement in sport, on the basis of mostly the same sources, see Wallner 2007: 139–44.

[64] Menander Rhetor 376 (ed. Russell and Wilson 1981).

[65] *Cod. Iust.* 11.42.1. This law was addressed to a Marcellus, probably Aurelius Marcellus, governor of Caria circa 293–305. Cf. PLRE I: 552 (Aurel. Marcellus 9).

[66] *Cod. Iust.* 10.54.1. *Impp. Diocletianus et Maximianus AA. et CC. Hermogeni. Athletis ita demum, si per omnem aetatem certasse, coronis quoque non minus tribus certaminis sacri, in quibus vel semel Romae seu antiquae Graetiae* (sic), *merito coronati non aemulis corruptis ac redemptis probentur, civilium munerum tribui solet vacatio. Aetas* means here 'bloom of life', i.e. the period in life in which one was physically capable of competing. For Hermogenes cf. PLRE I: 424. He was *proconsul Asiae* between 286 and 305. The law must postdate 293, however, because the Caesares are mentioned with CC. The editor of P.Oxy. LXXIX 5210 (AD 298) argues that the law was already issued before 298, as this petition also stresses the length of the career as a criterion for privileges. He does not count his victories, however, so the early date is not certain.

the financial situation of Nikopolis, so that also the *Aktia* could be revived.[67] When Valens, Gratian, and Valentinian II permitted the restoration of athletic games at Carthage in 376, they considered not only the happiness of the people but also the financial arrangements: the games were completely paid for by local sponsors.[68] Though at first glance this detail seems to offer a positive image of the financial state of these games, it actually attests to fundamental problems. In the second and third centuries, emperors checked the structural character of the funding, which had to ensure the permanence of the contest. Often this took the form of an agonistic estate.[69] In this case, however, the funding was not structural at all. Because it was paid purely from gifts, the contest would again have to be abandoned, as soon as there were no more Carthaginian notables willing or able to pay. The same emperors likewise answered questions about the office of contest president at various *agones*. Some rescripts answer specific questions: e.g. citizens of which cities could be alytarch at Ephesus or how was the alytarch to act in the sacred grove of Apollo? A constitution identifying the precise circumstances in which a man could be forced to become an *agonothetes* addresses a more general issue.[70] The detailed answers contained in the constitutions show that the emperors of the Valentinian dynasty found it important that the offices of president, and consequently also the *agones*, functioned well. In addition, the emperors also interacted with the athletic synod. There is evidence for two requests to erect a statue of a champion athlete in Rome. Valens, Valentinian I, and Gratian permitted the erection of a statue for Philoumenos, and a decade later Valentinian II, together with his eastern colleagues Theodosius and Arcadius, permitted one for John of Smyrna.[71]

The Theodosian dynasty continued along the same lines. In 409 Honorius and his eight-year-old nephew Theodosius II exempted presidents of *agones* and of provincial *venationes* from the expenditure limits for other presidents.[72] In this case it is unclear who petitioned for this: the codified version of the constitution is directed to the urban prefect, but the mention of asiarchs and syriarchs clearly shows that it was not specifically intended for the capital. The problem addressed is obvious, however: because of the popularity of expensive circus games the costs of entertainment were rising fast and this weighed on the notables, who had less money

[67] *Panegyrici Latini* 3.9.3. [68] *Cod. Theod.* 15.7.3.
[69] On the financing of *agones* by means of agonistic estates, see pp. 297ff.
[70] IK Ephesos 43 (372); *Cod. Theod.* 10.1.12 (379), 12.1.109 (385).
[71] CIL VI 10154 (367–375); CIL VI 10153 = IGUR I 245 (384–392). [72] *Cod. Theod.* 15.9.2 (409).

to spend on other projects. Expenses had to be cut. In comparison to the more frequently organized circus shows, the quadrennial *agones* formed a smaller financial burden. These contests were obviously valued highly by the court, though, since the exception in this law stimulated notables to spend money on these *agones* and the, similarly infrequent, provincial *venationes*, rather than on the circus. Hence, this law can be considered evidence for indirect financial support from the court. The same can be said about a rescript from 424, answering a petition from Delphi, that *curiales* from the prefecture of Illyricum could not be compelled to exhibit spectacles in the capital, but had to fulfill duties in their own cities.[73] Specific political considerations from the reign of Theodosius II are not attested in the laws on *agones*, but Weiler has shown that he definitely had a policy of supporting games in general.[74]

A ban in the fifth century?

The imperial responses to petitions regarding the finances of *agones* show that at least until the early fifth century emperors had a positive interest in these games. They tried to create solutions for financial problems endangering the *agones*, while they could have simply dismissed them. There was a conservative inclination among certain local elites to preserve traditional festivals and the emperors respected this. Late-antique emperors consistently treated *agones* as secular. Although the personal interests and beliefs of an emperor could certainly affect his actions – think of the cultural stimuli by Hadrian or the pro-Christian decisions of Constantine I – in general he could not afford to act in complete contradiction with the will of the ruling class. A Roman emperor had few means by which to enforce an imperial order that ignored the sensitivities of his subjects. Therefore, the financial and political implications of an action influenced imperial decisions to a strong degree. Above all, the steady income of taxes had to be secured. Therefore, the landowning class was the strongest pressure group in the empire, with more influence on the imperial policy than either the army or the church.[75]

The laws preserved in the *Codex Theodosianus* were collected in the 430s and published in 438. Only those laws that could still be considered relevant at the time were selected. As they show a consistently positive policy, a ban would not make sense in the context of the 420s and 430s. After 438, there is barely any evidence for the organization of *agones*, let

[73] *Cod. Theod.* 15.5.4 (424). [74] Weiler 2004: 67–75. [75] Cf. Jones 1964: 347–65; Millar 1977.

alone for imperial policy on this topic. This means that from this point in the reign of Theodosius II, there is also no evidence that can disprove the hypothesis of an imperial ban on the *agones*. By this date, however, there would have been no demand for a general ban, as the circuit had more or less collapsed. At this stage only a few games may have survived: a musical *agon* in Aphrodisias, perhaps an athletic *agon* in Rome, and the Antiochene Olympics, which were definitely not banned in the fifth century. Most of the late-antique laws on the character or finances of *agones* were not repeated in the sixth-century *Codex Iustinianus*.[76] The only relevant new constitution in the *Codex* – reflecting something of what happened after 438 – is Leo's decree from 465 that the alytarchy of Antioch became a *munus* of the *comes orientis*.[77] This again reflects a positive imperial attitude – Leo not only tolerated the existence of the Antiochene Olympics, he was even willing to spend state money on them – but concerns only one, perhaps exceptional, contest.

The above arguments do not exclude a local ban, however. Many imperial decisions were not meant to have empire-wide effect, because delegations usually petitioned the emperor on local problems. Each different local situation required a different answer. Therefore, a ban on one specific contest or on the contests in a single region cannot immediately be excluded. As discussed before, the willingness to preserve secular(ized) traditional festivals was not shared by all members of society. In the late fourth century anti-pagan feelings were expressed increasingly harshly. This leads us to an important question: would a delegation of opponents of the *agones* occasionally have been able to convince the emperor to abolish a specific *agon*?

The story of how an imperial order was obtained in 402 for the closure of the temple of Marnas offers an interesting parallel, because it shows political inconsistency as well as regional variety in the respect of the law. After half a century of constitutions on the closure of temples, all written to specific officials dealing with local situations, Gaza still had several functioning pagan temples, much to the chagrin of its new bishop, Porphyrios. In 398 the bishop sent a first delegation and obtained an imperial order for the closure of all temples. Willing to please his Christian subjects, the emperor naturally granted this request, which lay in line with previous constitutions. The magistrate who had been appointed by the emperor to enforce this law, however, was bribed by rich pagans to leave the Marneion

[76] The exception is *Cod. Theod.* 15.7.3 = *Cod. Iust.* 11.41.1 (376). [77] *Cod. Iust.* 1.36.1 (465).

alone. Therefore, the bishop organized a second embassy for the closure of this last temple in 401–402. Arcadius, now aware that an influential group of pagans was resisting, denied this second request, because these same inhabitants of Gaza paid their taxes loyally. He did not want to make the pagans flee the city and lose the income. The ambassadors stayed in the capital until the birth of Theodosius, who was immediately proclaimed Augustus. With the aid of the empress Eudoxia and a eunuch, the ambassadors then got the imperial order by making their request to the baby instead of the father. Arcadius, though unwilling to upset the pagans, felt he could not refuse the very first petition proposed to his son.[78] On principle, it cannot be excluded that certain Christian hardliners similarly convinced the emperor to ban the *agon* in their town. That would have been even more striking than the above case, however, as with such a measure the emperor would have gone against the lay landowners and against his normal policy at the same time, whereas in the above example the landowners wanted the opposite of his normal policy. It is, in other words, very difficult to blame the gradual decline of the *agones* on a series of hypothetical local bans.

There is another remarkable difference between the closure of the temples and the end of the *agones*. There are many and explicit sources on the discord within the cities regarding the closure of temples, including both literary and legal texts. Nothing of the sort exists regarding the fate of the *agones*. Petitions regarding *agones* specifically deal with finances rather than with their appropriateness. Rigid Christians complained mostly about Christian attendance at the games, not about their existence.[79] Apparently, the existence of *agones* was not such a big issue. In the case of the *agones* there were not two equally influential blocks creating a heated public debate. Instead, the end of the *agones* was a silent event, a "caduta senza rumore."[80]

The *agones* did not come to an end because the emperors ordered it. In general, a petition against an *agon* by a delegation of hardline Christians would have had little chance at court, as they did not have much pull as a pressure group. The emperor took care not to insult the lay taxpaying

[78] *Vita Porphyrii* (ed. Grégoire and Kugener 1930) 26–27 (first embassy), 33–54 (second embassy), esp. 41 (arguments of the emperor). Cf. Van Dam 1985: 13–17. Even if the historicity of the elaborate ploy of the bishop of Gaza could be disputed, it does show that the influence of rich landowners and the inconsistent enforcement of decisions were perceived as normal elements in imperial politics.

[79] For Christian objections to the attendance of games, see Chapter 13, esp. pp. 333ff.

[80] A term coined by Momigliano to describe the fall of the Roman Empire, applied to the end of the Olympics in Fargnoli 2003.

population. Imperial policy was in fact one of moral and financial support for the athletic contests. If the late-antique emperors are to be held responsible for the end of the *agones*, it is not so much because of what they did, but because of what they did not do for athletics. The *agones* were lumped together with other types of games in several imperial laws, but in fact had specific problems.[81] The emperors of the early Principate had perfected an institutional structure which channeled the inter-city competition for *agones* in such a way that the political benefits of these events reinforced the Empire, while local financial stability was safeguarded. In the fourth century cities complained about a lack of resources for *agones* and a drain of curial money to the capitals. The emperor reacted by promoting the use of curial money for *agones*: it was for example made possible to force a *curialis* to become *agonothetes* and the limits applied to presidents of horse races were not enforced on presidents of *agones*. Such measures did not offer a structural solution, however. They may have diminished the drain of money, but certainly did not stop it. The emperors were, in other words, fighting a losing battle. In order to understand the end of the *agones*, one needs to understand where these financial problems came from (cf. Chapter 12).

The case of the Antiochene Olympics

The Olympics of Antioch are the only contest that is explicitly reported to have been abolished by an emperor, although only in the sixth century. The problems with which all cities were struggling affected Antioch less than most. Because Antioch was one of the largest cities of the Empire in one of the most prosperous provinces,[82] it must have been easier than it was for many others to attract money and participants for games. Antioch was, moreover, the only city in which the problem of funding was solved on a structural level: the role of the *comes orientis* as administrator of the contest was eventually institutionalized, which made the games far less vulnerable to changes and temporary problems and thus secured their survival.[83] In the reign of Justin I, however, the Antiochene Olympics fell victim to a ban. This does not mean that the games came to an end purely as a result of this imposition from above. To understand this exceptional case, we need to look in more detail at the contemporary situation.

[81] E.g. *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.3: *vel ludorum vel circensium vel agonum*; 15.9.2: *agonothetai* and alytarchs heaped together with asiarchs and syriarchs.
[82] Liebeschuetz 2000: 214–15. [83] *Cod. Iust.* 1.36.1.

John Malalas mentions the cessation of the Antiochene Olympics in the context of factional riots.[84] By the early sixth century, circus factions had inserted themselves into most forms of entertainment. Hooligans of the Blue faction were rioting in many cities in the Empire in the early 520s. To calm the situation and punish the troublemakers, local governors and the emperor prohibited spectacles, dancers, and the Olympics, presumably in early 524.[85] It has been observed that the Olympics cannot have been a source of factional riots.[86] There is no evidence that the factions were even involved in the organization of the Olympics and the riots did not happen in Olympic years. Therefore, alternative reasons for the ban on the Olympics have been suggested: the games were too expensive, not in touch with the Byzantine mentality, or were not interesting enough for imperial propaganda.[87] Although there is some truth in each of them, none of these other reasons explains why the Olympics ended at this particular moment, nor why the idea came directly from the court. Only the factional riots can explain the timing and circumstances.

The absence of a clear connection between the games and the riots in fact does not argue against the historicity of a causal link. Twice before, Antiochene *agones* – not the Olympics, as these were not yet founded – had been temporarily banned, once by Marcus Aurelius because the Antiochenes had sided with the usurper Avidius Cassius, and once by Septimius Severus because they had sided with Pescennius Niger.[88] In both cases the disobedience of the Antiochenes was unconnected to their *agones* and the punishment was symbolic. Likewise in both cases, the games were reintroduced after a couple of months or years. In late antiquity, there are further instances of such temporary prohibitions of games. After the Riot of the Statues in the spring of 387 Theodosius I temporarily closed the

[84] John Malalas 17.12–13 (ed. Thurn 2000). In 16.6 Malalas also connects riots of the Green faction in 507, leading to an attack on the synagogue in Daphne, to "the so-called custom of the *Olympia*" (ἡ συνήθεια τῶν Ὀλυμπίων ἡ λεγομένη), but this odd link between an antisemitic riot and the athletic contest is probably invented. 507 was not an Olympic year (and Malalas' total of seventy-seven alytarchs (17.13) from 212 to 520 shows that the games maintained their quadrennial rhythm). The invention served as an explanation for the presence of a crowd in Daphne at the time. There could, however, be a number of reasons for that.

[85] Malalas 17.12 (ed. Thurn 2000) dates the escape of Theodoros, the urban prefect of Constantinople who was the first to react to these riots, to 524 (third year of indiction). Theodoros had according to Justin been too strict in punishing noble rioters.

[86] Lim 1997: 168. He argues here against Vasiliev 1950: 115–21, who in general overestimates the importance of the factions in politics.

[87] Lim 1997: 167–75 gives a *status quaestionis* and argues himself that the main factor was the marginal value of the Olympics to imperial rituals and ceremonials. The economic argument comes from Downey (1938: 365), the argument of mentality from Liebeschuetz (1972: 139–40).

[88] *Historia Augusta, Marcus Antoninus* 25; Herodian 3.6.9; *Historia Augusta, Severus* 9.

public baths, the theaters, and the hippodrome of Antioch.[89] The athletic infrastructure is not mentioned, but as the ban was short and the next Olympics were not taking place for another year, this should not be interpreted as a significant omission. Even bans that were meant to be permanent, such as Anastasius' prohibition of *venationes* in 499, rarely had lasting results.[90] Because temporary bans were a normal punishment for different forms of disobedience, and not a solution for a specific problem with respect to games, a riot in Antioch could make the emperor shut down the entire Antiochene entertainment sector, including the Olympics, connected to the factions or not.

The significant element of this case is not that the Olympics were forbidden, but that they were not reintroduced when the other spectacles were. The last Antiochene Olympics took place in 520. The games of 524 were banned, but in 528 they could be continued, like the rest of the entertainments. Although there is good evidence for the popularity of the Olympics in the patriarchate of Severus of Antioch (512–518), the effect of eight years of silence should not be underestimated. Unlike during the bans of the second and third centuries, when the agonistic circuit had merrily continued outside of Antioch, this ban represents eight years in which not a single person had participated in an *agon*, not in the organization, nor in the competitions, nor in the festivities. This is long enough to lose touch with the details of how an archaic festival worked. Moreover, the budget of the Olympics, administered by the *comes orientis*, had in this period probably been diverted to other purposes. In 525 parts of the city were destroyed by a great fire. In 526 and 528 major earthquakes brought further destructions. The priority in the later 520s and 530s was essential rebuilding, and, as we have seen before, diverting the agonistic funds for such urgent projects was a normal practice already in the second century. Two years after being sacked and looted by the Persians in 540, the Justinian plague reached Antioch.[91] Reintroducing the Olympics thus never came back on the agenda. Possibly, the Antiochenes did not even mind. The *agon* was after all an anachronism in Byzantine society.

[89] Libanius, *Or.* 20.6. For this riot see the classic study of Browning 1952.
[90] For this ban see Lim 1997: 164–66. [91] Downey 1963: 242–48.

CHAPTER 10

The athletic professionals

The social status of athletes

Social status is influenced by many factors, such as legal status, wealth, income (i.e. future wealth), education, and social connections. It is partially predetermined by social background (inherited wealth, education paid for by parents, family connections) but changes throughout life when people acquire new sources of income, are officially honored or dishonored for their actions, and create new connections. Professional occupations are an important factor in status attribution.[1] For people who defined themselves as athletes, therefore, this can be expected to have affected their place in society. To establish the social status of 'professional athletes', we thus have to look at the social background necessary to become an athlete (in how far was the skill a form of cultural capital and how much did it cost to obtain it?), at the connections one could forge as an athlete, which were determined by the way the athletes were organized, and at how their status was guarded or limited by the government. Roman laws and decisions of city councils on the status of specific groups typically represented and enforced an elite consensus; this is clear for decisions taken by a city council, but is also true for Roman law, since, as we have seen in the previous chapter, wealthy landowners, as the largest source of taxes, had the most influence on policy in the Empire.

Discussed in this chapter on 'professional athletes' are all men for whom athletics was a central ambition and occupation during a substantial phase of their life[2] and who identified themselves as athletes or competitors, that is not the ephebes and hobbyist athletes who competed once or twice in local or regional contests. The quotation marks refer not only to the word

[1] See e.g. Hollingshead 2011 for the importance of professional occupations in modern assessments of social status.

[2] A criterion also used by the tetrarchs in *Cod. Iust.* 10.54.1.

'professional' – which does indeed deserve them because of the unnecessary pejorative meaning this term carried until quite recently – but to the group of athletes as well. Putting under one denominator all men for whom athletics was a major part of their identity, because they were professionally engaged in it, creates the illusion that they all identified themselves as part of this one group. As we will see, however, the 'group' of late-antique athletic professionals is an artificial and modern construct, and ignoring this can affect historical interpretations. Men falling under this denominator often had very little to do with one another and moved in different social circles.

Looking back at the status and background of imperial-age athletic professionals helps to understand the apparently greater social variety among late-antique athletes. Typically, the social background of people active on the imperial-age (and earlier) agonistic circuit was higher than average. In order to become athletes, boys had to be fed healthily and sufficiently and had to receive the opportunity to excel at local games. This excluded the poorest families. An important cost was training (e.g. in throwing techniques, wrestling grips, etc.), although this was not equally expensive for all sports. For running natural talent would have been far more important than a good trainer, while for combat sports or the *pentathlon* more technical training was required. Competing in the running contests was, on the other hand, relatively more expensive than competing in the combat sports, as the prizes were considerably lower, while the traveling costs were comparable. To have both natural talent and abundant financial resources was therefore the easiest way to an international career, but possessing a lot of one could compensate for a relative shortage of the other. If a boy came from a family with only average means, but was obviously talented, he might get subsidies or loans to launch his career.[3] Wealthy families, on the other hand, could invest more in training and nutrition to make up for a lack of natural talent.

Even more than social background, success was the key factor in the status that athletes felt and had attributed to them during and after their career. The highest status was enjoyed by the great international champions who excelled in the top games of the *periodos*, the so-called *periodonikai*. Usually, these men had already won several contests with sacred and eiselastic status, besides many thematic games, and the resulting

[3] Hellenistic examples of financial help: IK Ephesos 1415 and 2005, P.Lond. VII 1941. Roman laws about loans to athletes: *Dig.* 4.2.23.2; 22.2.5.pr-1; 42.1.40.

exemptions, privileges, membership of the *boule*, and prize money formed their entrance ticket to the upper class, if they had not belonged to it in the first place. The monuments for these happy few, however, distort our picture of the general status of professional competitors: the upper end of the scale is greatly overrepresented.

Besides champions there must have been many more young men who despite all the investments of their family were just not good enough to be successful on the international level, men who had never received the opportunity to fully develop their natural talents, or men who could just not afford the journeys over long distances. For these athletes it could be a strategic choice to compete mostly in the lesser contests of the international circuit or only in their own regions, where they actually stood a chance. Eirenaios, for example, competed internationally as a child, but as an adult focused on the local circuits within Syria, trying his luck on the international circuit on only one further occasion.[4] Locally, victors could profit from lucrative cash prizes and occasional privileges too, but these could hardly help them to rise above their social class of origin.

Those competitors that lacked even significant successes on the local circuit are only occasionally attested in funerary inscriptions or papyri.[5] A particularly interesting example is the boxer Hermeinos from Hermopolis, known from a family archive on papyrus.[6] He traveled to Italy and to Asia Minor to compete, but not a single document from the archive mentions an athletic title, so presumably he never won any major contest. His family belonged to the lower elite or upper-middle class: he and his brothers owned two houses in the city – one inherited from their father, the other from an uncle – but had to lease agricultural land. Their education was basic by elite standards, but far above average: Hermeinos, the oldest brother, could not write, but his later career as a boxer suggests that he had received athletic training; the two younger brothers could write, although the youngest only barely.

Other athletes without fancy titles worked outside the agonistic circuit. Festival accounts show that village feasts without *agones* could feature a few athletic matches as popular entertainment. The organizers paid these athletes, typically specialists in combat sports, wages regardless of the outcome

[4] For this athlete see p. 91.

[5] SEG VI 203 is the funerary inscription for a Phrygian victor of two games in Phrygia and a contest in Brundisium. His presence at Brundisium shows that he competed internationally, but the rest of his CV indicates that he was not particularly good at it.

[6] P.Lond. III 1178 = Pap.Agon. 6. For this archive see van Minnen 1986.

of the match.[7] An athlete who regularly got hired for such occasions could make a living in this way, or at least a little on the side. The athletes mentioned by name in an account from Roman Egypt, for example, had Egyptian names (not combined with a Greek one, as was the case for many competitors on the circuit), which points to a lower-class or lower-middle-class background.[8] Lower-class parents would not have been able to offer their sons much technical training, but in a combat match against another athlete who had equally little technique natural physical prowess was far more important. An extreme example of athletes who worked outside the agonistic circuit is dwarf athletes. Although people with dwarfism (achondroplasia) stood no chance on the official circuit, some of them were trained as athletes, because staged competitions between dwarfs were considered fun entertainment at, for example, dinner parties.[9]

The existence of athletes whose activities were entirely or partially located outside the agonistic circuit raises the question of how these were perceived by their colleagues within the circuit. Even though not all competitors had a strictly upper-class background, the agonistic ideology had been formed by the aristocracy, which was traditionally strongly and originally even exclusively involved in it. The Greek elite generally looked down upon people working for wages. As Pleket has well explained, this is not the same as nineteenth-century amateurism, where all financial benefits were disdained. In antiquity, competing for a cash prize was honorable, as this was not the same as competing for wages. When one competed on the agonistic circuit, one contributed to one's own honor and the honor of the family and city and moreover increased the family's wealth, which was already sufficient to pay for the necessities of life. Even accepting starting fees was not necessarily problematic, as this was like an honorarium, a sum given in exchange for a favor. Competing for wages, on the other hand was working for others in order to meet daily expenses, and for the elite such a thing was improper. Performing at a village festival or a dinner party was therefore something a member of the elite would not have deigned to do. If their athletic skills were insufficient for the contest circuit, richer boys

[7] E.g. P.Oxy. III 519 (2nd c.), an account with sums for artists, people to walk in the procession, pankratiasts, and boxers for a local festival: that both the pankratiast and his competitor (ἀνταγ(ωνιστῆ)) got paid clearly shows that these were wages; SB IV 7336 (late 3rd c.), an account for two festivities in Oxyrhynchus: for the Sarapis feast, they hired a dancer, a comedy-actor, and two pankratiasts as entertainment.

[8] O.Heid. 348, l. 5: Πατσ() ἀθλητ(ής); l. 8: Πεβῶς ἀθλητ(ής). The ostrakon has been dated to the second century on palaeographical grounds, and attributed to Elephantine on uncertain onomastic grounds. If either date or location is correct, these were far removed from the agonistic circuit.

[9] Brunet 2003b.

would have been directed to other career paths.[10] Not everyone could afford to be so fastidious, however. Lower on the social ladder people would be less judgmental and accept public performances as a way to make a living.

This evaluative play, in which the same activity could be perceived either positively or negatively depending on the context, is very similar to the modern use of the words 'career' and 'job'. At the upper end of the social scale just sketched one could meet the high-status individuals, who are omnipresent in the epigraphic record, and who saw competing on the agonistic circuit as a career that would mark them as people to be reckoned with; at the lower end figured a far harder to trace type of athletes who performed outside the circuit as a job. There is no reason to assume that these formed closed groups in the second and third centuries. The plethora of small-scale local games represented a large middle ground that offered lower-class athletes a possible entry into the circuit. The stars of local games would, on the other hand, also have been in demand for demonstration matches at other festivals in the city. They may have found it an honor to compete in a demonstration match during the main feast of their home town and could interpret as an honorarium what people higher up the social scale would have considered wages.

A growing divide between 'career athletes' and 'athlete performers'

The distinction between the 'career athletes' on the upper end of the scale and the 'athlete performers' on the lower end of the scale continued to be fluid as long as there were local circuits. In the early fourth century a considerable group of people without an aristocratic background still had access to athletic education through the gymnasium, and could test their talent in *agones* organized by the city, as well as hire themselves out for events. Dioskourides, a *paradoxos* (one of the lesser agonistic titles) turns up in the accounts of an estate in Egypt, where he had been hired by the owner in 321 or 336 for a feast where mimes also performed.[11] We can assume that Dioskourides was not born in one of the elite families of Hermopolis: rich young men were surely not offered wages to perform at a private party. Nor can we assume that he was from a real lower-class

[10] Pleket 1992 offers a good summary of the ideology of ancient athletes, particularly toward prizes, in the context of the wider elite mentality. This ideology is only characteristic of the agonistic circuit, though, as Pleket did not discuss the few examples where athletics clearly was a way to pay the bills.

[11] SPP XX 85.

background. He competed successfully on the agonistic circuit, as he carried the minor title *paradoxos*, which suggests at least a certain investment in technical training. Most likely, he can be situated toward the middle of the social ladder. Growing up around 300 he could still have participated in the ephebate or have learned from an athletic trainer teaching in the gymnasium, and tried out in the Hermopolitan games, where his talent may have been discovered.

If Dioskourides had been born fifty years later, he would not have had any of the opportunities sketched above. By the mid fourth century, when the regional circuits were disappearing, talented boys of families with average means had fewer opportunities to be scouted and to train. Moreover, the organization of the ephebate stopped in the first half of the fourth century. Because nearly all of the evidence is epigraphic, our documentation for the ephebate disappears already in the third quarter of the third century.[12] In Athens, however, the city that was famous more than any other for classical Greek education, the lists of ephebes from the mid third century are the longest of all the imperial-age lists. While this could mean that the interest peaked at this time, it could also mean that the ephebate was organized only every few years, perhaps because interest was already fading.[13] There are, however, no obvious signs that a real decline set in before the last quarter of the century. Menander Rhetor (late third or early fourth century) suggests that, when making a speech seeing off a friend, a young man should recall the shared exercises in the palaistra.[14] The ephebes of Oxyrhynchus were certainly still competing in local ephebic games in 323 and the whipping contest in Sparta, which was connected to the local ephebate, still existed circa 330 as well.[15] The last evidence for the ephebate is a *kosmetes* at Antinoopolis in 347, whose duty was spread over two short periods in the year.[16]

From the mid fourth century on, becoming an athlete meant either competing internationally with the big champions, or performing outside the circuit entirely. It was no longer possible to start a career by competing only in smaller games or in one's own region. Of the variety of imperial-age athletes those that could be placed somewhere toward the middle of the

[12] Kennell 2006: xiv–xv.

[13] IG II^2 2191–2245. Cf. Dumont 1876: 56 (which is still the most complete study of the Attic ephebate in the imperial period); Wiemer 2011: 518–19. In IG II^2 2245 (262 or 266), both sons of Herennius Dexippos participated in the ephebate at the same time, which is already one indication that the ephebate was no longer annual. This list is the longest of all (Kennell 2006: xv n. 46).

[14] Menander Rhetor 396 (ed. Russell and Wilson 1981).

[15] Libanius, *Or.* 1.23; P.Oxy. I 42.

[16] P.Ant. I 31.

social scale thus suffered most from the changes in late antiquity. The overlap between the career athletes and athlete performers disappeared, in other words.[17] By the second half of the fourth century these groups would have been clearly separated by location, by their style of competing (technical versus more brutal free-style), and by social background and concomitant ideologies. This social distance is expressed in the ways they identify themselves or are identified by others in documents. Career athletes did not see themselves as athletic professionals, but identified themselves by their achievements, that is with honorary titles (e.g. *hieronikes*). Their victories distinguished them from their social peers. Athlete performers, on the other hand, were distinguished from other lower-class men by their profession and were called 'the boxer' or 'the athlete'.[18] Only with respect to the level of competition may they have moved closer to each other than had been the case in the early Empire. Fewer *agones* automatically meant fewer career athletes and a drop in the level of competition, while at the same time the rising number of opportunities at Roman spectacles could take the competition between athlete performers to a new level. It seems, however, that career athletes did not like to compete with athlete performers. John Cassian describes how athletes were screened before being allowed to compete at *agones*; they had to give evidence of their status and participation in games so far.[19] Late-antique authors took special care in their descriptions of career athletes to distinguish them from athlete performers, so that the picture would not be clouded by the latter's more negative perception (see Chapter 13).

For the talented athletes at the top end of the social scale little changed in the fourth century, as the international games still existed and so did the private training that discovered and molded their talents from a young age. Part I presented several examples of late-antique career athletes, such as Philoumenos of Philadelphia, John of Smyrna, or the Olympic victors listed on the bronze plate discovered in an Olympic latrine. The erection in Rome of statues for Philoumenos and John, at a time when statues for local

[17] Preliminary results of my research on this divide were published as Remijsen 2012.

[18] Late third- and fourth-century athletes styled *hieronikai*: P.Flor. I 64, P.Lips. I 18, P.Oxy. I 59, XXVII 2477; *paradoxoi*: P.Oxy. IX 1205, P.Oxy.Hels. 28; *periodonikes*: P.Oxy. XIV 1643. Fourth-century athletes identified by their profession: P.Oxy. XLVIII 3426, P.Lips. I 66, P.Lond. V 1831, P. Herm 20 ('athlete'), CPR VI 50, VIII 44 ('boxer'). Cf. IAph2007 2.313, an inscribed jar identifying the owner as boxer. Two earlier examples of non-agonistic papyri mentioning athletics as a profession are BGU II 576 ('wrestler') and P.Lond. III 1158 ('boxer'), but these were less successful career athletes. The wrestler is mentioned in a list between curial officials and the boxer is known from P.Lond. III 1178 to have been a member of the international athletic association.

[19] John Cassian, *Instituta* (SC 109) 5.12. See also p. 342 for this passage.

notables were no longer customary, is revealing of the prestige the greatest international champions still enjoyed. Like their imperial predecessors, late-antique career athletes were normally well-to-do. Circa 300 retired career athletes indeed still figure in papyri as owners of land, money, and slaves.[20] In the course of the fourth century, when training always involved a private teacher and the traveling distances between games increased because of the fall-out of smaller games, competing on the agonistic circuit became more expensive still and therefore even more an elite pursuit. Highest up the social ladder of all late-antique athletes was the Armenian prince Varazdates. More representative for the whole group of career athletes were perhaps the two sons of a man called Valens, Horos and Phanes.[21] In 364 this family mingled in Antioch with notables such as the circle of Libanius. Valens was rich enough to invest in a proper education for his children: he had them trained in letters as well as athletics, presumably by reputed teachers. The sons were young men on the verge of an athletic career. Their father traveled with them around Syria, where there was at the time still some kind of regional circuit. Horos even won the Olympics in Antioch. Afterwards, they traveled south.[22] Initial successes could stimulate them to compete at the top games, but if they did not succeed, they still had a good literary education to fall back on and to use as a leg up for a career in the administration or scholarship. Horos has in fact been identified as the cynic philosopher and ex-boxer portrayed in Macrobius' *Saturnalia*.[23]

In the 360s and 370s there seem to have been enough games left to organize one's year around. This was what Philoumenos, for example, was still doing. By the end of the century, however, it became difficult to live as a full-time competitor: there were only a couple of *agones* left, not regionally grouped. As a result, the career athlete was on the verge of extinction. Even for the best athletes, the material and social benefits to be gained no longer weighed up against the costs of the long-distance traveling. In the late fourth and early fifth centuries the *agones* returned to what they had been in the archaic period: an expensive hobby. The only remaining

[20] P.Oxy. XIV 1643 (298): about the runaway slave of a *periodonikes* and xystarch; P.Laur. III 74 (late 3rd c.): sale of a house by a *hieronikes*; P. Oxy. LXXIX 5211 (303): loan of a substantial sum granted by a *hieronikes*; P.Lips. I 6 (306): sale of 1 1/6 aroura land by a *hieronikes*.

[21] Libanius, *Ep*. 1278– 1279.

[22] Libanius gave them a letter of recommendation for Elousa, located southeast of Gaza. This city is not known to have had games, but may have been a stop on a journey to Alexandria.

[23] Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.7.3. Cf. PLRE I 445 (Horus).

prospect was glory, an idea that even after the collapse of the circuit survived in literary images.

In the meantime, the athletes on the other end of the social scale discovered new opportunities at the Roman-style spectacles. Job openings were created in particular by the growing fashion for circus games across the East. Organizers of circus games in the East, where athletics had deeper cultural roots, were probably inclined to include athletic matches more frequently than their western colleagues. The spread of the circus thus created a new type of athletic circuit, where athletes could make a living without ever competing on the traditional circuit. When the circus games were first introduced in provincial towns, the organizers probably hired mostly local performers, who had previously mainly performed at town festivals. Considering the decline of the palaistra and the ephebate, these men would have enjoyed little formal training. Perhaps they learned the basics by watching athletes as young boys and picked up some tricks from more experienced men, but mostly they are likely to have been hired for their natural physical prowess. It is of course possible that major circuses also hired famous career athletes, but these would have been a lot more expensive and would take the offer only if the match seemed prestigious enough, for example for a special occasion. Athlete performers would have been less fastidious. Although the ancient texts – mostly written by and for the elite – barely inform us about this lower-class group, it may have been substantially bigger than that of the career athletes by the late fourth century.

The evidence begins in the mid fourth century. Ammianus Marcellinus describes how Gallus, half-brother of Julian, and the Caesar residing in Antioch between 351 and 354, was sometimes absorbed in the boxing matches in the circus, exulting in the blood and in the near death of the contestants.[24] The battle of the boxers is presented by Ammianus as cruel, not heroic, and the violence as atrocious but addictive at the same time. Though blood is often present in depictions of boxing matches at *agones* – look, for example, at the Capsa mosaic (Fig. 6) where blood drips profusely from the left ear of a boxer – in literature this negative stress on violence is atypical, because athletics is often connected to moral virtues. The story is included here as an illustration of Gallus' cruel nature. Attributing to an emperor complete absorption in spectacles (as opposed to a healthy interest) was in Roman literature a traditional way to expose an immoral character. The trope of absorption in gladiatorial combat – or gladiators

[24] Ammianus Marcellinus 14.7.3.

in combination with boxers as in the case of Elagabalus[25] – is in this fourth-century Syrian scene replaced by boxers alone. Gallus was absorbed in six or sometimes seven contests. Because of the sheer size of a circus a single match would not make an impression, as it would barely be visible from most seats. Therefore, the circus direction had to hire a whole group of athletes, to stage several matches concurrently. Most people would be able to follow only one or two at the same time. From the imperial box one had of course a better view than the average spectator, but Ammianus' claim that Gallus followed seven matches at the same time was foremost a way to stress his depravity.

In some sources from the mid fourth century it is not that clear whether an athlete should be considered a career athlete or an athlete performer. The *pammacharii* of Gaza and wrestlers from Ascalon, mentioned in an overview of the entertainment sector in Syria in the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, may have been famous for winning either at the *agones* or at the circus. Their inclusion among performers such as charioteers, pantomimes, and acrobats suggests the latter possibility, but the fact that neither of these cities had a circus implies the former. Perhaps a strict distinction is not even appropriate in this case, as the *Expositio* was written circa 360, when Syria still had some games in smaller cities, which could attract athletes who did not strictly belong to one of the two groups.

Papyri show in which milieus athlete performers could be found in the fourth century. Sois the boxer figures alongside a donkey-driver and a carpenter in a list of people who had bought grass.[26] The athlete Isidoros was paid less than the value of four cucumbers for an odd job.[27] These men were definitely moving in different circles from Libanius' athletic friends.

The best evidence for athletes at the circus comes from the fifth and sixth centuries, with four circus programs from Egypt and literary indications from Constantinople and Rome.[28] The inclusion of athletics in the Roman entertainment sector even led to a Latinization of the vocabulary: a wrestler from Constantinople is, in a Greek text, called λουκτάτωρ (Lat. *luctator*).[29] The sixth-century bronze Kovacs vase with the Green pankratiast Privatulus shows the same stress on spectacular violence and humiliating cruelty as in Ammianus' earlier descriptions: the loser is kicked in the face, thrown like a sack of flour, and taunted (Fig. 5a–c).[30]

[25] *Historia Augusta, Heliogabalus* 25. [26] CPR VIII 44 (4th c.).
[27] P.Oxy. XLVIII 3426 (4th c.).
[28] P.Oxy. XXXIV 2707; LXXIX 5215 and 5218; P.Bingen 128; Procopius, *De bellis* 1.24; Cassiodorus, *Variae* 5.42.
[29] *Vita Theodori Syceotae* 88 (ed. Festugière 1970). [30] Klose and Klein 2013.

A relatively modern theory – in comparison to that of the imperial ban – connects the success of athletic matches in the new context of the circus with a restructuring of the professional organizations of the entertainment sector. As convincingly established by Cameron, the circus factions had by the late fifth century become the main corporate organizations of the entire entertainment sector, including not only charioteers but also mimes, dancers, and even athletes.[31] Although Cameron saw the decline of athletic games and gymnasium culture as one of the causes for the upsurge of the circus, it was subsequently proposed that expansion of the circus factions may in fact have resulted from a merger between the factions and the athletic or 'xystic' and the artistic synods. One of the circus programs of Oxyrhynchus indeed calls the group of athletes performing in between two races a *xystos*.[32] Bagnall has suggested that (in Roman Egypt) the organization of athletics and horse racing were well integrated by the early fourth century.[33] Roueché has argued for an integration in the fifth century, when the circus factions spread from Rome and other major cities of the Empire to virtually every city in the Mediterranean, including those without a circus. This expansion to non-equestrian shows suggests to her that the circus factions absorbed the traditional synods.[34] To assess the likelihood of this hypothesis, we once again have to go back in time, in order to establish who belonged to this association, how it was structured, and what it did for the athletes. Once we know who belonged to the xystic synod, and why, we can assess whether a merger with the circus factions was a logical response by the athletes to the changes in the entertainment sector.

The creation of an international association of athletes

The imperial-age xystic synod developed out of the need for an exchange of essential and authoritative information: competitors needed to know the agonistic calendar, they needed to be able to prove their victories at home, and they needed procedures to raise and solve problems within the circuit. Upon arrival in a new city they likewise needed information on the local services. In the archaic and classical period the *proxenoi* appointed in each city no doubt had an important role in this information exchange. In the Hellenistic period, however, the communication process became increasingly difficult, because the area in which contests were held grew, while international relations became less transparent, with *poleis* belonging to

[31] Cameron 1976: 193–222. [32] P.Oxy. XXXIV 2707. [33] Bagnall 1993: 104–05.
[34] Roueché 1993: 57–60.

Hellenistic kingdoms, to federal states, falling under the Roman Empire, or acting independently. Consequently, traveling artists and athletes felt a growing need for an organization unbounded by political borders.

By the mid third century BC there were several regional associations of performing artists: one centered around Athens, one around the Isthmian and Nemean games, one incorporating the athletes in Egypt and another those in Ionia and the Hellespont, which would later fuse with an association centered around Pergamon.[35] Their first purpose was to protect the economic interests of the artists: they ensured safe travel conditions, regulated the demand and supply by appointing artists to perform at festivals, and promoted social status by ensuring extra honors.[36] The associations had a religious function as well and were in particular connected to the royal cult.[37] Athletes, on the other hand, were not yet organized in such region-wide associations. The head start of the artists suggests that they had a greater need to associate, probably because there were more professional artists than athletes. A career in athletics was only possible for those who had the talent to compete at the major games. Less talented athletes, who could perhaps occasionally win a local contest, would not easily take this up as a career, because the rewards of the hometown and multiple prizes could not yet compensate for the costs of long-distance travel. In the early Hellenistic period, there were not yet as many minor contests as there would be under the Principate. Performing artists, on the other hand, were more in demand, as they were indispensable at any kind of festival, not only at the *agones*. Moreover, they had longer careers and a higher degree of specialization and – consequently – professionalism.[38] The existence of this large group of professionals stimulated the formation of an association which could ensure their privileges.

The first evidence for athletes taking a decision as a collective body dates from the first century BC. An inscription from Erythrae mentions four groups: the *demos* of the Erythraeans, the *demos* of the Eleans, the athletes from across the world, and the *hieronikai* from across the world.[39] The inscription is concise – it mentions only those four bodies and depicts three crowns in relief – but the situation is clear: because of a victory or some

[35] The Hellenistic associations of artists are discussed in two monographs: Le Guen 2001 and Aneziri 2003. Both works contain a corpus of all relevant Greek texts. Le Guen also gives a translation into French. Aneziri 2009 gives a shorter overview of the development of the artistic associations in the Hellenistic and imperial period. Van Nijf 2006 describes the context in which both the artistic and athletic associations developed.

[36] Van Nijf 2006: 226–27. [37] Le Guen 2001: 88–90; Lightfoot 2002: 220–21.

[38] Le Guen 2001: II.105–32. [39] IK Erythrae 429 (circa 100–30 BC).

kind of benefaction at Olympia a man from Erythrae was rewarded with a crown from the Eleans. Additionally, he was also honored by the body of athletes and the body of *hieronikai* with two more crowns, and by the Erythraeans with this inscription. That these two groups of athletes acted as collective bodies was an important innovation. The document teaches us very little about how they were organized, however. One cannot even be certain that either of them were formal organizations by this point; they may just represent the competitors present at these Olympic games.

That the *hieronikai* stood out as a separate group among the athletes should not be a surprise. In the classical period only a small number of victors had enjoyed privileges, but in the Hellenistic period this group had gradually grown. The victors of the stephanitic games, from the late second century BC on more and more called 'victors of sacred games' or *hieronikai*, were treated as a distinct group in civic society, which for example had its own place in processions.[40] Because in their claim to privileges the *hieronikai* had common economic interests, the pressure to cooperate was stronger for them than for other athletes. Around the time that athletic champions were becoming true cosmopolitans, the first evidence for a formal organization of *hieronikai* appears in a letter of Marc Antony, from 42/41 or 33/32.[41] The *triumvir* met in Ephesus with the trainer Marcus Antonius Artemidoros, a personal friend who apparently owed his Roman citizenship to Marc Antony, and Charopinos, the eponymous priest of the "synod of the international victors of the sacred and stephanitic games" (σύνοδος τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκουμένης ἱερονικῶν καὶ στεφανειτῶν).[42] Some commentators have suggested that this synod was composed of both artists and athletes,[43] but Pleket was probably right when he interpreted it as a purely athletic association.[44] The representative of the synod was a trainer and, as far as we know from the limited evidence, only athletes treated the *hieronikai* as a separate group in the Hellenistic

[40] E.g. IvM 98 (197/196), SEG XII 511 (circa 140), IvP 246, l. 34 (138–143).

[41] The letter is known from a copy on papyrus, first published by Kenyon 1893 (= SB I 4224). Forbes 1955 gives an English translation and comments. The text was republished by Ebert 1987, together with fragments of an inscription (IK Tralleis 105) with a second letter by Marc Antony.

[42] The consistent use of only one article for '*hieronikai* and *stephanitai*' in this and all later references to the association, shows that it was a single group described by two words. The name of the association reflected the contemporary use of the pleonastic expression 'sacred and stephanitic games'. Although this pleonasm disappeared in the early first century AD as a categorizing term for contests, it survived in the name of the association, since names tend to be conservative. See Remijsen 2011: 100–01.

[43] Forbes 1955: 240. [44] Pleket 1973: 200.

period; the artists had acquired privileges for all members of their associations.[45]

The identification of the group as a synod and the presence of an eponymous priest, and therefore a cult, indicate that this was a formally organized association. To ensure privileges for its members, it turned to the highest power, in this case a Roman magistrate, in the same way as artistic associations had earlier turned to the Hellenistic kings. With the letter of Marc Antony, the synod received confirmation of existing privileges and was awarded new privileges: exemption from military service and from having people quartered in one's home and immunity from liturgies. The synod also organized its own games, for which a sacred peace, inviolability, and the right for the president to wear purple were granted.[46]

The development of this international association of athletes and many particularities of its activities remain largely in the dark. Forbes, the first to write a systematic account, described the evidence as "a patchwork, pieced together with difficulty almost wholly from inscriptions and papyri, and marred by disturbing lacunae."[47] It is not even certain whether the association of the late first century was already a worldwide association of victors. Since the document was addressed to the *koinon* of the Greeks in Asia, theoretically only the Asian cities had to respect the privileges granted by Marc Antony. Even if they extended to all areas under Roman influence, some athletes – namely the Egyptians – were not yet protected by them. After Marc Antony had been defeated at Actium, however, the whole Greek world was ruled by Rome. The availability of one authority to grant or refuse privileges for the entire Greek East made the association's lobby work easier. The letter of Marc Antony remained an important precedent, however. This explains why it was copied in second-century Egypt, in a semi-literary hand on the verso of a medical papyrus.[48]

The imperial-age association was called the "international xystic synod of those around Herakles" (σύνοδος ξυστικὴ περιπολιστικὴ τῶν περὶ τὸν Ἡρακλέα).[49] The adjective 'xystic' is derived from the word for a covered running track: ξυστός. The name of the place was applied to the body of athletes that met there. In the first century AD the performing artists were

[45] The privileges for the artists were not restricted to victors. See e.g. I.Cos 7 (= Sherk 1969: no. 49). The first evidence that the *hieronikai* formed a separate group within the association of artists is a letter by Claudius (BGU IV 1074 = Pap.Agon. 1). P.Oxy. LXXIX 5202 is a new text from roughly the same period.

[46] This contest is attested in IAG 59 (20 BC).

[47] Forbes 1955: 238. Pleket 1973 is still the best attempt to make sense of the evidence.

[48] Kenyon 1893: 476. For a photograph, see Ebert 1987.

[49] P.Lond. III 1178, ll. 18–19 = Pap.Agon. 6: σύνοδος ξυστικὴ περιπολιστικὴ τῶν περὶ τὸν Ἡρακλέα.

organized in an international association as well: the "international thymelic synod of those around Dionysos," which included victors of sacred games as well as their co-competitors.[50] The latter no longer enjoyed the same privileges as they had in the Hellenistic period.[51] Both of these associations are first attested in letters of Claudius; the first inscriptions mentioning officials of the xystic association likewise date from his reign.[52] In his letter to the performing artists, Claudius confirms privileges conferred on them by Augustus.[53] Although this is not explicitly mentioned, he conferred privileges on the athletic association as well, as Vespasian confirms these in a later letter.[54] These privileges may go back to the Hellenistic privileges mentioned in the letter of Marc Antony, which were maintained and increased by Augustus.[55]

The somewhat inconsistent terminology used for the associated athletes in imperial-age documents has led to hypotheses assuming a double association. The main questions regarding the precise composition of the association are: does 'those around Herakles' refer to the athletes or only the *hieronikai*; and, secondly, what was the relation between the xystic synod and the 'entire *xystos*' (σύμπας ξυστός)? If we are to assess the likelihood of a late-antique merger with the circus factions, the problem of membership is a major issue that needs to be solved first.

Pleket assumed that there were originally two separate associations: an international synod of the victors of the sacred and stephanitic games, which continued the Hellenistic association, and the new xystic synod, an association of lesser athletes. He argues that the two groups merged in the early second century. The reason for proposing this merger is that the full name σύνοδος ξυστικὴ τῶν περὶ τὸν Ἡρακλέα ἀθλητῶν ἱερονεικῶν στεφανειτῶν is not attested before the reign of Hadrian.[56] Before this time, one finds either the incomplete σύνοδος ξυστικὴ τῶν περὶ τὸν Ἡρακλέα or οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκουμένης ἱερονῖκαι καὶ στεφανῖται. Problems with the idea of a merger are, however, firstly the lack of proof that before the reign of Hadrian only lesser athletes were intended under the first

[50] Full name from the first letter of Hadrian (ll. 5–6) in Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: σύνοδος θυμελικὴ περιπολιστικὴ τῶν περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον. The earlier letter of Claudius is addressed to the members of the synod, not to the synod itself, cf. BGU IV 1074 = Pap.Agon. 1, l. 1: <τοῖς> ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκουμένης περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον ἱερονείκαις στεφανείταις καὶ τοῖς τούτων συναγωνισταῖς.

[51] Aneziri 2009: 222 links this new attention to *hieronikai* with the fact that performing artists had a low social status in Roman law, unlike sacred victors.

[52] IG II² 1970 (an Athenian list of ephebes mentioning a xystarch). More first-century xystarchs in IK Smyrna 731 (80 and 83), IK Ephesos 1124 (late 1st c.).

[53] BGU IV 1074, ll. 1–3 = Pap.Agon. 1.

[54] P.Lond. III 1178, ll. 8–36 = Pap.Agon. 6.

[55] Suetonius, *Augustus* 45.

[56] Pleket 1973: 202–12. For the full name see IGUR I 235–236.

name, and secondly the fact that the worldwide *hieronikai* continued to act separately from the xystic synod later in the imperial period, usually in local *ad hoc* associations as was the case before the reign of Hadrian. Indeed, the proposal that the xystic synod was originally an association of only lesser athletes is not tenable. The letter of Claudius to the synod shows that this synod was already very influential in the mid first century. Such direct interaction with the court is unlikely for an organization with only lesser athletes. The first object of professional associations was, moreover, looking after the economic interests of their members, for example, by coordinating the demand and supply of competitors or by lobbying for privileges. Organizers of games would not contact a synod that could offer them only less talented participants. Lesser athletes could not claim privileges either. Early officials of the xystic synod were, moreover, *hieronikai*.[57] The success of the xystic synod can be understood only if the *hieronikai* were an integral part of it. In some respects, such as privileges, the *hieronikai* did of course differ from the other athletes. This explains why the *hieronikai* at times acted separately, in local divisions or *ad hoc* associations, which causes the diversity of names in the evidence. The more logical evolution is that the not-yet-victors were incorporated in the pre-imperial association in the early first century and that 'xystic' was at that time added to the name. The new artistic association similarly represented both groups: οἱ ἱερονεῖκαι στεφανεῖται καὶ οἱ τούτων συναγωνισταί.[58]

The second problem, namely the distinction between the *synod* and the *xystos*, comes most clearly to the fore in an inscription of AD 85. Here the Olympic benefactor Lucius Vettulenus Laetus is honored by three bodies of athletes: the athletes present at the Olympics in this particular year, the 'entire *xystos*', and the sacred xystic synod.[59] This shows irrefutably that the 'entire *xystos*' was not a synonym for the xystic synod, but it has proved difficult to pinpoint the difference between these two bodies. The main problem is that documents from and to the synod often mention the high priest of the entire *xystos*. Since the synod was clearly a formal association of *hieronikai* and other athletes, the challenge is to define the *xystos*. Most scholars have attributed a double meaning to this designation: on the one hand as referring to a temporary body of all people involved in athletics present at a certain place, and on the other a second formal association, with unclear responsibilities.[60] Though the former interpretation may well

[57] IK Ephesos 1124: a late first-century *periodonikes* acting as xystarch.
[58] BGU IV 1074, l. 1 = Pap.Agon. 1. [59] IvO 436.
[60] The idea of this double meaning goes back to Forbes 1955: 243–47. Pleket 1973: 216 discusses the problem in a long footnote (n. 64).

be correct when the word *xystos* is not further defined, the majority of epigraphic evidence combines this word with the adjective σύμπας, and the 'entire *xystos*' cannot be an *ad hoc* body, as the aforementioned inscription explicitly distinguishes it from the athletes present at the Olympics when L. Vettulenus Laetus was honored. The inscription of 85 indeed seems to imply that the entire *xystos* includes all people involved in athletics on the entire circuit, not just those present. This does not mean, however, that the entire *xystos* was a second, larger association.

An association is a well-defined group that can act as one, independently of others. Proof for the xystic synod's power to act independently is available in the form of letters of the synod to its members, to cities and to emperors, letters from emperors to the synod, honorary monuments erected by the synod, etc.[61] No documents record an independent act of the entire *xystos*, however. In the few honorary decrees emanating from it, the *xystos* acted in agreement with a formally organized group and did not take an independent decision.[62] Another characteristic of a formal association is that it has its own officials, for when a group has the power to take decisions, it can also appoint its own leaders. The word *xystos* appears in the titles of high officials: it is consistently used in the title of the top athletic official, the 'high priest of the entire *xystos*', and a few secretaries and a doctor of the *xystos* are attested as well. The latter two roles, however, do not suffice to prove that the synod was a formal association, as these officials worked at local branches and are mostly known from funerary texts, which do not necessarily respect the correct technical terminology.[63] The title of the high priest does require explanation. Since he consistently appears in documents emanating from the synod, it is clear that he was appointed by the synod and not by the *xystos*. A certificate of membership of the synod was for example dated to the high priesthood of two men and signed by one of these men as a witness.[64] Honorary decrees for high priests usually emanate from the synod as well.[65]

Therefore, I conclude that the xystic synod was the formal association of athletes and the entire *xystos* was the athletic community in general. The

[61] See in particular the collection Pap.Agon. and IGUR I 235–248.
[62] IvO 436, IAph2007 12.719 (with xystic synod), TAM V.2 977 (with the associated *hieronikai*), MAMA III 104 (with the *boule* and *demos* of Olba).
[63] FD III.1 209, IK Erythrai 416 (ἀρχιγραμματεὺς ξυστοῦ), CIG III 4155, SEG XXXIV 1022 (γραμματεὺς ξυστοῦ), TAM V.2 1097 (ἀρχιατρὸς τοῦ σύμπαντος ξυστοῦ). Except for the first these are all epitaphs, i.e. not formal decrees. IGR 3.1371 honors a xystarch as a ὑπὲρ τοῦ σύνπαντος ξυστοῦ τὸν εὐεργέτην.
[64] P.Lond. III 1178 = Pap.Agon. 6. [65] E.g. IGUR I 243, 244.

xystic synod had a team of officials and an official list of members. Papyrus certificates and honorary decrees emanated from it and imperial letters were addressed to it. The *xystos*, on the other hand, was an informal body including all athletes and trainers. It was not an association with a structure and official members and did not negotiate with the emperor or state officials. Presumably, the whole athletic community profited from the work of the synod, but not all to the same extent, as the main allegiance of the synod obviously lay with its members. The title of the high priest at least shows that the synod wanted to represent the entire community particularly in the field of religion: his religious sacrifices were evidently envisaged as contributing to the well-being of everyone on the circuit.

The main criterion for whether or not an athlete belonged to the formally organized synod can be found in the only surviving membership certificate, a papyrus roll of more than one meter known as the 'diploma of the boxer Hermeinos': he paid a membership fee of 100 denarii.[66] This certificate was stored in the family archive by his brother Theognostos – who unlike Hermeinos could read and write – together with other documents, such as a contract of sale between the two brothers for a third of a house. This is highly relevant, as the comparison between prices gives us a good indication of whether the membership fee was meant merely to cover the administrative costs or represented a serious financial investment. Hermeinos received 300 Alexandrian drachmas for his part of the inherited house. 100 denarii equals 400 Alexandrian drachmas. It was, in other words, not an amount spent lightly. The high fee marks the synod as a fairly elite association, certainly not open to the entire spectrum of athletic professionals, constituting the *xystos*.

The structure and role of the xystic synod

That some athletes were willing to pay serious money to belong to the association can be explained by the benefits it offered. The synod supported the athletes on two levels: locally by helping them out during the games and internationally through contacts with the highest levels of power. The officials knew the existing contests, regulated where possible the movements of the competitors, and defended the privileges of victors. The international athletic association, in other words, maintained an

[66] P.Lond. III 1178, ll. 4–7 = Pap.Agon. 6 declares that Hermeinos had fully paid the official amount of 100 denarii.

overview and by spreading important knowledge fulfilled a necessary condition for the expansion of an international agonistic circuit under the Principate.

The functioning of the synod depended on a large network of officials. Local divisions were administered by *archontes*, secretaries, and treasurers, usually working in their own regions.[67] They provided the competitors with certificates, accepted members, and appointed new local officials. There are indications that the association also offered athletes practical support in the form of medical care and training facilities during the games.[68] The best-attested local officials of the synod are the xystarchs, who were present at every festival. One of their duties was to ensure the presence of athletes – preferably *hieronikai* – at the games.[69] As members of the athletic association they could locate available competitors more easily than local organizers. Therefore, xystarchs had a crucial role in the workings of the agonistic circuit as regulators of demand and supply. Sometimes xystarchs were appointed for a single contest, certainly in case of the most prestigious games, but often they acted at all the contests in a city or sometimes even in a region, which made them key figures in the communication between local branches.[70] Their duties during the festival are not quite clear as, unfortunately, we know little of the practicalities of contests,

[67] The only extant membership certificate (P.Lond. III 1178 = Pap.Agon. 6) was not only signed by an *archon* and a treasurer, but also by the head secretary of the synod and by its highest official, the high priest of the entire *xystos*. Hermeinos paid his membership fee at Naples, i.e. in the realm of the high priest, who resided in Rome and acted as xystarch of the region. The annex of the document, which certifies that Hermeinos had paid the fee to act as imperial priest at the games at Sardis, shows the normal practice. It was signed by two *archons*, a treasurer, and a secretary, all citizens of cities in the same general area as Sardis. Three membership certificates of the artistic association (Pap.Agon. 1, 3, and 4) written in Egypt were signed by officials originating from Egyptian cities.

[68] TAM V.2 1097 is the epitaph of an ἀρχιατρὸς τοῦ σύμπαντος ξυστοῦ. It is not at all certain that the athletic association possessed its own infrastructure (cf. p. 46 for the presumed clubhouse in Olympia), but, considering the status of its officials, the association could probably arrange access to the best facilities for its members.

[69] In P.Oslo III 85 = Pap.Agon. 8, the *prytanis* of the city council of Oxyrhynchus writes to the xystarch to ensure that enough athletes would arrive in time at the local *Kapitolia*.

[70] In some cities with many games, such as Miletus, M. Aurelius Demostratos Damas acted as xystarch at only one contest, but in other, e.g. Alexandria, he acted at a number of games. He was even xystarch for the whole of Egypt (Sardis VII.1 79 ll. 13–34). Other xystarchs of particular games: FD III.1 466 (*Pythia* at Delphi), I.Napoli I 41 (*Aktia*), IC I.18 55 (games of the *koinon* of Crete); of cities: IvO 55 (Smyrna), IK Smyrna 667 (Philadelphia and Byzantium), I.Napoli I 41 (Mopsuestia and Magnesia), IAph2007 12.920 (Colonia Antiocheia), IvM 180 (Cyzicus); of regions: IG II² 3741 (Bithynia), Bean and Mitford 1965: no. 3 (Lycia). The districts of the xystarchs changed in the course of time. IG II² 3687 names Aelius Gelos as "the first xystarch of the games in Athens" (reign of Hadrian or Antoninus Pius). The first attested xystarch in Athens, however, lived in the reign of Claudius (IG II² 1970). He perhaps did not act at all Athenian games or else was responsible for a wider region.

due to the limitations of the mostly epigraphic evidence. Presumably they facilitated contacts between the participants and the local organization, for example in case of a conflict between the two parties. For their work, the xystarchs received an honorarium; part of the sum was contributed by the athletes, part by the city or the president of the games.[71] Many xystarchs were appointed for life and, at least from the reign of Septimius Severus on, emperors could play a role in their appointment.[72]

The local divisions of the synod also appointed priests for each contest from among the *xystici* (i.e. the members of the synod) present at the contest. The boxer Hermeinos, for example, paid 50 denarii to act as priest at games in Sardis. These priesthoods were temporary honorary offices, which could advance its members in elite society.[73] The religious aspect is not to be overlooked, however, as for ancient athletes the religious role of the synod surely mattered. The life of the traveling competitor was a life with few certainties: professional athletes were constantly absent from home, were on each journey in real danger of being shipwrecked or attacked by bandits, and lived in constant fear of injuries, which could ruin a career, and on top of all of this endured the psychological pressure of a career in competitive sports.

Far better attested than the local divisions are the top officials of the synod. The highest official was the aforementioned high priest of the entire *xystos*. This office, often combined with that of xystarch,[74] was one of the greatest honors for an athlete after his career. It usually went to great champions such as retired *periodonikai*. Several men could hold this title at the same time, because they remained appointed for life, although they did not perform the function for life. In some cases it became hereditary.[75] It is not clear where the high priests resided in the first century or even if

[71] Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 1, ll. 34–40; P.Oxy. VII 1050; SB X 10493 (400 denarii for ephebic games).

[72] Under Septimius Severus and Caracalla: Sardis VII.1 79 and SEG XII 512 = IK Anazarbus 25; under Valerian and Gallienus: IK Smyrna 667.

[73] P.Lond. III 1178, ll. 50–65 and 84–102 = Pap.Agon. 6.

[74] Although most inscriptions give both titles, in some cases the high priest is not called xystarch, e.g. I.Napoli I 51, IK Ephesos 1104. This does not mean that he did not have the title, only that it was less important. Marcus Ulpius Domesticus was certainly appointed as xystarch for life (cf. IGUR I 237), but sometimes this title is omitted (IGUR I 235–236).

[75] For xystarchs e.g. IGUR I 240, 244, P.Lond. III 1178, ll. 50–57 = Pap.Agon. 6. In IGUR I 238, 240, and 244 we find three different pairs of fathers and sons in the same role. In Sardis VII.1 79, Septimius Severus and Caracalla explicitly grant the high priesthood and xystarchy to M. Aurelius Demostratos Damas and his descendants (ll. 20–22: τήν τε ἀρ[χιερω]σύνην καὶ τὰς ξυσταρχίας εἰς τὴ[ν τῶν] παίδων διαδοχήν).

they had at the time a fixed place of residence.[76] After the foundation of the *Kapitolia* by Domitian, however, Rome became an important city for the athletes. During the winter break in the second year of the Olympiad, when the athletes prepared themselves for the games in Rome and Campania, the training facilities incorporated in the newest bathing complexes of Rome must have attracted many international athletes.[77] The increasing interest in Greek athletics among the Roman elite moreover created jobs for retired athletes who became trainers. Already during the reign of Hadrian a club of retired athletes connected to the international athletic association had settled in the capital. A member of this club was Marcus Ulpius Domesticus, the fourth known high priest of the synod, originally from Ephesus, but resident, with citizenship, of Rome. He made a request to the emperor that benefitted the athletes for many years: he asked for a location in Rome to install permanent headquarters for the association. Hadrian granted this request, but it was only under Antoninus Pius that a building near the baths of Trajan – a traditional meeting place for the athletes – was given to them.[78] It is called a τέμενος, sacred domain, which suggests that it contained a cult place for the patron god Herakles. The headquarters also gave the synod a place to store its archives. Athletes spending their winter in Italy could search them and discover which combination of victories could count as their personal record.[79] From this moment on, the high priest of the *xystos* was "head of the imperial baths" as well.[80]

The headquarters in Rome ensured proximity to the highest authority in the Empire. It enabled the athletic association to maintain good relations with the emperor. This was an important asset in securing the social status

[76] Of the first known high priest, Diogenes son of Mikkalos, nothing more is known than that he came from Antioch and received Roman citizenship from Claudius (P.Lond. III 1178, ll. 27–31 = Pap. Agon. 6). The second known high priest, Tib. Claudius Artemidoros, *olympionikes* of 69, came from Tralleis, but also had the citizenship of Alexandria, Ephesus, and – as his name reveals – Rome. The inscription that honors him as high priest of the *xystos* was erected in Ephesus (IK Ephesos 1124). The third known high priest, the Alexandrian T. Flavius Archibios, *olympionikes* of 101 and 105, received Roman citizenship from Domitian after his first victory in the *Kapitolia*. The inscription in his honor by the local division of the synod in Alexandria is erected in Naples (I.Napoli I 51).

[77] The names of some of the best second- and third-century athletes figure on mosaics in Rome and nearby Ostia, see Newby 2005: 28 (spread of baths with sporting facilities since Agrippa), 58–67 (named athletes on mosaics).

[78] IGUR I 235–238. See Rausa 2004 for the location of this building. For M. Ulpius Domesticus see IG V.1 669. In IGUR I 237 he speaks for the club of athletes ἀπὸ καταλύσεως ἐν τῇ βασιλίδι Ῥώμῃ κατοικούντων ("who were after their retirement living in the capital Rome"). For the meaning of κατάλυσις see Pleket 1973: 218.

[79] For the importance of athletic records see Tod 1949, or more recently Gouw 2009: 97–153.

[80] See Caldelli 1992: 79–86.

of the athletes, for the emperors could confirm and extend the privileges of victors.[81] They did not do this on their own initiative: it was the synod that brought these issues to their attention. Hadrian's letters to the synod of performing artists show that the association took to the emperor problems affecting its members and that he mediated between their wishes and those of the cities, while keeping an eye on the financial situation.[82] In general, the evidence does not allow us to examine which privileges were granted by which ruler, but the name of the synod indicates to which emperors they were particularly grateful: by the late second century, the synod was called Ἁδριανὴ Ἀντωνιανὴ Σεπτιμιανή.[83] Part of the synod's activities might well be called lobbying: keeping in touch with the powerful, so that the synod could call upon them when it wanted privileges or funds. The monuments erected for important benefactors also fit into this context of lobbying for influence.[84]

Although membership of the xystic synod did not come cheap, joining was a sensible decision for a talented young athlete of sufficient means, taking everything into account: as *xysticus* he could be sure that he was taken seriously as a professional, would know where to go for contests, and could go to the doctor of the association in case of an injury. These circumstances could help him win one or more of the sacred contests and enjoy the privileges the synod had lobbied for. After a successful career he could even become xystarch and return home as a well-to-do and respected citizen. If that same athlete had not joined the synod, but had tried to find his way in the circuit independently, he might have ended up participating in games with too many competitors or too small prizes and eventually returned home without fancy titles, but with his travel budget spent, perhaps blaming himself for not having sacrificed enough to Herakles. If traveling on the international circuit was not on his agenda, however, because of an insufficient level of training, or an insufficient traveling budget, the advantages of joining were minute and the membership fee exorbitant. Hence before late antiquity, athletes on the lower end of the social scale were rarely *xystici*. For the hypothesis of a merger with the circus factions to make sense, the athlete performers in the circus must have been members, however, and we should, therefore, find democratizing tendencies in the fourth century.

[81] Suetonius, *Augustus* 45. P.Lond. III 1178, ll. 34–35 = Pap.Agon. 6: confirmation of privileges by Vespasian. Cf. BGU IV 1074, ll. 2–9 = Pap.Agon. 1: repeated confirmations of privileges of the artists by Claudius, Hadrian, Septimius Severus, Caracalla, and Alexander Severus.

[82] Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: esp. letter 1.

[83] P.Lond. III 1178, l. 2 = Pap.Agon. 6.

[84] E.g. IvO 436.

Lobbying for privileges in the late third and fourth centuries

Although the imperial-age synod probably accepted all athletes who registered during one of the *agones* and paid the fee, not all of them profited from the privileges they lobbied for, which were connected to a specific type of victory. Most privileges required a victory in a sacred contest. *Hieronikai* enjoyed *ateleia* and *aliturgia*, which means they were exempted from taxes, both standard taxes imposed on their possessions (gained at the games or by other means) and special taxes, and from being appointed for a civic duty. Some imperial-age texts even add ἀτελεῖς to ἱερονικαί as a kind of extra title.[85] These victors were also exempted from other obligations that were not linked to their home town, such as the obligation to provide guarantors or to act as judge (μὴ κρίνειν). The latter privilege is still attested in 292, when the Oxyrhynchite *hieronikes* Theodoros was exempted from sitting in the prefect's court, a duty that would have required him to travel about 400 km to Alexandria.[86] Besides these, they enjoyed pure privileges, such as *proedria*, the right to sit on the first row at public gatherings, for example in the theater.[87] Victors at eiselastic games received, on top of the above, monetary allowances from the city, called *opsonia*, which are well attested in papyri from the later third century.[88]

In the first half of the fourth century, the title of *hieronikes* becomes rare. It does not even appear in athletic metaphors after Eusebius of Caesarea.[89] At first glance, this is not surprising: all athletic titles (as also for example *periodonikes*) are rare in late antiquity, because the number of athletes active on the shrinking agonistic circuit declined and because the late-antique evidence consists in large part of literary texts that avoid technical terms. However, the titles are missing even in a few inscriptions where one would expect them.[90] The last attestation occurs in a list of landowners from about 350. The two (probably retired) *hieronikai* in this list most

[85] E.g. IK Ephesos 3005 (85–96), ll. 8–10: τῶν ἱερονεικῶν [κ]αὶ ἀτελῶν καὶ ἀνεισφό[ρ]ων; P.Tebt. II 286 (131), l. 13 and M.Chr. 197 (203), l. 6: τῶν ἱερονικῶν καὶ ἀτελῶν. In P.Oxy. XLIII 3116 = Pap. Agon. 10, M. Aurelius Sarapion, a man from Oxyrhynchus who had recently won the chariot races at the *Kapitolia* in Antinoopolis, informs a magistrate of his own city that this victory gives him complete exemption from taxes and liturgies.

[86] P.Oxy. I 59. Distance to Alexandria calculated with the Trismegistos Google Map.

[87] The most complete lists of privileges are BGU IV 1074, ll. 3–4 = Pap.Agon. 1; P.Oxy. XXVII 2476, ll. 5–6 = Pap.Agon. 3.

[88] SPP V 54–56, 69–70, and 74 (all 267–268).

[89] Eusebius, *De martyribus Palaestinae* (SC 55) 3.1; 11.19. The only later attestation is John of Damascus, *Laudatio sanctae martyris Barbarae* 3 (ed. Kotter 1988) in the early 8th c.: ἱερονίκου καὶ στεφανίτιδος, an awkward imitation of ἱερονίκης καὶ στεφανίτης.

[90] E.g. IGUR I 246 (donation of the Apollonii), CIL VI 10154 (for Philoumenos). In CIL VI 10153 (for John of Smyrna) the omission is not remarkable, as the style of this epigram is more literary.

likely competed under Constantine. A papyrus on athletics of about 343 speaks about career athletes as στεφανῖται, which before the fourth century was, except in the archaizing name of the athletic synod, never applied to people.[91] That it came up as a substantive at this very moment may be linked with the decline of the title *hieronikes*: the other word in the name of the association, which referred to the old pleonasm 'sacred and stephanitic contest', offered a ready alternative for denoting the top athletes. In Christian metaphors *stephanitai* was also used to denote victors from the mid fourth century on.[92]

In a papyrus from 390, Asklepiades was exempted from nocturnal guard duty at Hermopolis.[93] Although exemption from guard duty was one of the privileges listed in a letter of Hadrian to the synod of the performing artists[94], there are no known examples of competitors claiming their right of exemption from nocturnal patrols in the city, as this was a typical liturgy for the lower classes. Interestingly, Asklepiades did not escape guard duty because he was a victor – unlikely circa 390 in Hermopolis, as the Egyptian circuit had long collapsed – but simply because he was an athlete.[95]

The disappearance of titles related to privileges as well as an exemption for an athlete performer could potentially point to a democratization of privileges and membership of the xystic synod, were it not for one essential piece of evidence: the aforementioned law in which Diocletian and his fellow emperors limited the exemption from personal civic duties or liturgies (i.e. the privilege of *aliturgia* or *a muneribus civilibus personalibus immunitatem*[96]) to triple *hieronikai*. The advantage of this measure was obvious: it lifted from the cities the economic strain, caused by the inflation of agonistic titles. From an inclusive or democratic standpoint, the athletes are the victims of this law, as a considerable group among them lost one of their most claimed privileges, but the cities benefitted. As with most imperial constitutions this limitation was issued at the request of a stakeholder.[97] The version of this law preserved in the *Codex Iustinianus* is

[91] This papyrus is published in Hoogendijk 2012. For *stephanites* see Remijsen 2011: 99–101.
[92] This starts with the Cappadocian fathers. The only earlier example is Origen, *Homiliae in Job* (PG 17) 63.
[93] P.Lips. I 66 (390), esp. ll. 19–20. [94] BGU IV 1074, ll. 4–5 = Pap.Agon. 1.
[95] Ll. 19–20: Ἀσκληπιάδη[ς Τ]ιμοθέου [c. 4]θέντ(ος) ὡς ἀθλητής. Unfortunately, no convincing reading of the middle word, which could affect the interpretation, has been proposed.
[96] P.Lips. I 44, Col. II, ll. 7–8. This version is longer than *Cod. Iust.* 10.54.1.
[97] The role of the synod in this matter is not discussed in the commentary on P.Lips. I 44, nor in the discussion in Amelotti 1955: 149–53.

addressed to the Asian proconsul Hermogenes.[98] This may suggest that Hermogenes had brought the problem to the attention of the emperor in the name of the Asian cities. As the rescript does not refer to a specifically Asian context, another possibility is that Hermogenes was merely informed of the new rule and that someone else had raised the matter. The longer and less edited version of the law, preserved on papyrus, shows that we are dealing with the latter case.[99] This version was addressed to the synods of the *xystici*, the *thymelici* (actors), etc. (l. 2: *ad synodum xysticorum et thymelicorum et ividem*) and explicitly states that the number of privileged victors was limited "at your request" (l. 8: *ad praeces vestras*). Due to the inflation of agonistic titles – resulting from the successful requests for sacred games by a very large number of cities – many competitors who had not paid the membership fee of the athletic and artistic associations were enjoying privileges in the late third century. There is no evidence for late-antique membership fee rates for the athletic synod, but in the second half of the third century the fee for the artistic synod was 250 denarii. These membership certificates were not found in the context of a family archive, but comparison with contemporary prices and wages shows that this was not an amount spent lightly: 250 denarii equals 1,000 Alexandrian drachmas, which is comparable to a year's rent of a house with courtyard or to the price of hundreds of liters of wheat or of several nice mantles. The elite would have been able to afford this – other investments such as a house, slave, or horse cost several thousand drachmas – but for the lower classes, who made only a few drachmas a day, the fee was exorbitant.[100] Sometimes the synod of the performing artists is thought to have included the entire community of performers, on the ground that even traditionally non-agonistic performers such as mimes and pantomimes were eventually admitted.[101] As pantomime had been included in some artistic *agones*, there is indeed evidence for 'career pantomimes', who may indeed have joined the synod. Poor performers, however, were still unlikely to join because of the fee.

The inflation of agonistic titles made it increasingly difficult for the real champions and the members of the synod to distinguish themselves from the rest. From an exclusive, elite standpoint – that is the standpoint most

[98] *Cod. Iust.* 10.54.1. For Hermogenes see PLRE I: 424. [99] P.Lips. I 44.

[100] P.Oxy. LXXIX 5208, l. 10 (3rd c.); Pap.Agon 1, l. 15 (273–274); 3, l. 16 (288). The reading of 850 denarii in the latter text is corrected in P.Oxy. LXXIX 5208 n. 10. For lists of prices see Drexhage 1991: esp. 19, 86–87, 94, 266, 278, 300, 361, 423, 428–29 for the examples cited.

[101] Roueché 1993: 58–59.

consistent with ancient agonistic ideology – the *xystici* definitely benefitted from a limitation of the privileges. The criteria set out in the new law show that competitors traveling on the agonistic circuit, that is career athletes for whom membership was an investment in their career, were targeted as the group deserving of privileges: only those who had spent an entire career competing, had won three sacred contests, at least one in Greece or Rome, and had done so without corruption, enjoyed exemptions. The primary allegiance of the synods lay with their paying members. Their interests would often coincide with that of the entire *xystos*, but not in this case. Social status depends by nature on comparison to others. The general athletic (or artistic) community was worse off after the limitation, but the average member of the synods benefitted from it, as he again ended up higher on the social ladder than the other competitors. The artistic association evidently regarded Diocletian and his co-Augustus Maximian as generous, as the artists added their imperial names to the name of the association.[102] The request for this new rule, a matter on which the athletic and artistic association agreed, is clear evidence for the continuing exclusivity of these synods.

The limitation to triple victors was probably maintained throughout the fourth century. In Egypt, someone kept a copy of the rescript, no doubt to use in court. John Cassian still knew about the *inmunitatis privilegio* at the end of the fourth century.[103] The eventual inclusion of Diocletian's rule in the *Codex Iustinianus* does not mean that the law was still in use in the reign of Justinian – the agonistic circuit had long since collapsed – but does suggest that it was never replaced.[104] The legal restrictions also explain the disappearance of technical terms such as *hieronikes*. As the status of games was no longer the main criterion for privileges, the titles derived from them became meaningless. The only unexpected element in the sources is the exemption from guard duty for the lower-class performer Asklepiades. Perhaps this was inspired not so much by the legal framework for career athletes, but by the idea that games were indispensable for the happiness of the people, and that a good performance had to be ensured.

[102] Pap.Agon. 3, ll. 13, 15.

[103] John Cassian, *Instituta* (SC 109) 5.12. This work was written in Gaul, in the early fifth century, but John Cassian's (born circa 360) knowledge of athletics probably goes back to the late fourth century, when he was living in the Greek East.

[104] It was not included in the *Codex Theodosianus*, as this includes only laws from 313 on.

The structure of the synod in late antiquity

In the fourth century the synod continued to function as an exclusive, well-organized, and moreover independent organization. On the basis of the above Diocletianic law directed *ad synodum* (singular!) *xysticorum et thymelicorum et ividem* it has been suggested that the athletic and the artistic synods had at this point merged or at least functioned in close association.[105] Cooperation between the sister organizations must indeed have been common, before and after this date, since their interests coincided, but as the athletic synod continued to act independently on at least some occasions, a full merger is unlikely.

The athletic synod's headquarters in Rome continue to be better attested than the local divisions. In the reign of Constantine, they were amply staffed with a chief secretary, several high priests headed by a 'first high priest', and a *synarchia* of archons. They still attracted donations, as the gift of the Apollonii illustrates.[106] In the 360s we know of a doctor of the association in Rome, and in the following decades the synod received permission to put up statues of two of its greatest contemporary champions.[107] The imperial grant of permission indicates that the association still had some pull at court. Nevertheless the close link with the emperor, that the association had had in the second and third centuries, was severed because emperors rarely spent time in Rome. The athletes again had to send embassies to court to negotiate, as they had done before they settled in Rome. The available training infrastructure at the headquarters was also apparently reduced. By the late 420s the main building of the headquarters was even donated to the Church by Theodosius II (see Chapter 5).

The local divisions are more difficult to follow, which is unfortunate: whereas the officials at the headquarters may have done most of the lobby work, the important role of the synod with respect to communication with and to the members happened on the local level. Of the local officials the xystarchs are easiest to trace. In the late 330s Firmicus Maternus referred to

[105] P.Lips. I 44, l. 2; Roueché 1993: 55–57.

[106] IGUR I 246, esp. B2–3: εἰ δέ τις βούλεται ἐν τῇ μελλούσῃ περιόδῳ [–] τὸ ἔνγραφον, εἴτε τις κατασταθῇ ἐπὶ τῇ στατίωνι ἀρχιγραμματεύ[ς κατὰ] τὸν προάγοντα τύπον, ἤτε καὶ τῶν ἀρχιερέων τις ἤτε συναρχία τῆς συνόδου, εἴτε ἀρχιγραμματεῖς ἢ καὶ γραμματεῖς οἱ κατὰ καιρόν, διδότωσαν χεῖραν τῇ Λονγείνῃ . . . "If someone wants, in the next *periodos*, . . . the register, either when someone is appointed as chief secretary in the headquarters according to the existing model, i.e. either one of the high priests, or the synarchia of the synod, or the chief secretaries or the secretaries in function, they should give a handwritten document to Longina"; B10: τῷ πρώτῳ ἀρχιερεῖ.

[107] *Cod. Theod.* 13.3.8 (doctor, cf. Roueché 1993: 56), CIL VI 10154 (Philoumenos), CIL VI 10153 (John).

them as "leaders and presidents of the palaistra-people."[108] Several decades later, Ammianus, a well-traveled Antiochene, still considered the dress of a xystarch a familiar image.[109]

In only one text do we see a xystarch in action. The interpretation of this source is problematic, however. The archive of the estate manager Apollonios, from about 320, contains orders for payment to a xystarch and to a boxer, which could suggest that the xystarch was remunerated for his help in hiring the boxer.[110] This is odd because in the early empire xystarchs were responsible for a particular contest, sometimes several contests in a region, but they are not known to have acted as agents for individual athletes. The document is too early for us to assume that the boxer was purely an athlete performer, as there were still regional games in the Egyptian *chora* at the time, but evidently he took on jobs as performer or private trainer outside the circuit. It is not clear whether or not he was a member of the association.

Additionally, the estate manager paid sums to a poet and to an official of the Blue faction.[111] Although none of the receipts give us details on why these men received payments or gifts, Bagnall presumed that the poet, boxer, xystarch, and official of the Blues all belonged to "some sort of unified enterprise," which was created when the circus was introduced into Egypt. He considers the organization of athletics and horse racing to have been firmly integrated by the early fourth century and the xystic synod and factions to have more or less merged.[112] This idea is based on Gascou's suggestion that all four men in the archive worked for the hippodrome of Hermopolis.[113] This proposal is problematic for different reasons. Firstly, the receipts come from the archive of a landowner, not of someone in the entertainment sector. Hence they cannot offer concrete evidence that the *xystici* and the circus were working together in any official form in the fourth century. For xystarch in particular it should be added, moreover, that this function often appears in documents as an honorary title unrelated to the content of document. Secondly, as we have seen above, other fourth-century sources reveal the xystic synod acting as a separate association. Thirdly, the first firm evidence that Hermopolis even had a circus and races is from the sixth century. The only explicit evidence for the factions

[108] *Mathesis* 3.7.7 (*palaestricorum hominum duces praepositosque*); 9 (*palaistricis praepositos et eorum duces*).
[109] Ammianus Marcellinus 21.1.4. [110] CPR VI 41 and 50. [111] CPR VI 47 and 63.
[112] Bagnall 1993: 104–05.
[113] Gascou 1983: 226–27, a discussion of CPR VI 63, in less explicit terms than Bagnall's conclusions.

being functional in fourth-century Egypt comes from Alexandria,[114] from where this particular official may have been visiting. Moreover, if xystarchs worked for the circus in the early fourth century, one expects that they would have continued to work there as long as there were athletes and circuses in Egypt. Instead, all information on xystarchs disappears around the same time as the *agones*, several decades before the first firmly dated evidence for circus games in the *chora*.

Because the payments belong to a private archive, a far safer hypothesis is that the estate manager organized a private party or parties with entertainment, or perhaps even training in boxing for his children. The xystarch may well have helped out the landowner in hiring a boxer, but this need not have been in any official capacity. The xystarchy was hardly a full-time occupation; most *agones* were held only once every four years. Doing favors would not have been part of the xystarch's official duties as representative of the athletic association, but given his professional network it was a natural extension of it: a xystarch knew many local athletes and would be the logical person to ask for advice when one wanted to hire some of them. If the payment of a landowner to a xystarch is evidence for anything, it is for the continued existence of local divisions of the synod, with active officials who had a wide personal and professional network.

The collapse of local contest circuits would have removed the reason for the existence of local divisions of the synod in the relevant area. This means that by the second half of the fourth century, local divisions no longer spanned the entire middle and eastern Mediterranean, although athletes may still have originated from this entire area. Indirect evidence for this comes from Antioch in the 360s. At that time Libanius was assisting the organizers of the Antiochene Olympics in finding potential competitors via his international network of notables, including competitors from Egypt where the local circuit had largely collapsed and where local divisions of the synod are no longer attested in the papyrological record. Despite their lack of corporate representation, the top athletes were still in a good position to negotiate: the organizing city wanted them and they might answer either yes or no. Governors were asked to put pressure on them and to offer transportation, so they would be more inclined to agree. In none of Libanius' letters is the expected intervention of xystarchs in this matter mentioned. This is of course no proof of their disappearance from all regions; Libanius had no reason to state what was perhaps obvious to him, nor did he aim to provide a comprehensive picture. His fellow citizen and

[114] P.Cair.Isid. 57 and 58.

contemporary Ammianus Marcellinus moreover still wrote about xystarchs. The focus on the governor in each of the letters does suggest who may have taken up a role in the information exchange in those regions where the local divisions had dissolved.[115] This would be a logical extension of the governor's increased involvement in the organization of the *agones*, which will be discussed in Chapter 12. An advantage of this development for the athletes was that where the synod could give only traveling advice, governors were in a position to offer the means of transportation.[116]

Although the evidence is scarce, little points to an eventual merger of the synods and the circus factions. Circa 300 the synod still upheld an elitist membership policy and there is no reason to suppose that the xystic synod later included lower-class athlete performers. In fact these increasingly became socially separated from the career athletes. The agonistic collapse will have led to a gradual but inescapable depopulation of the exclusive club of the *xystici*. This quantitative decline went hand in hand with the dissolution of the wider network of local divisions. Roueché's scenario, in which the synods of performing artists and athletes merged in the fourth century and in the fifth century received imperial orders to divide into two groups, the Greens and the Blues, under the supervision of civic authorities[117] is thus incompatible with the evidence: only in major cities such as Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome did the circus factions and the synods even coexist before the supposed merger; in the minor cities – which is where the sudden arrival of the circus factions needs explanation – there is a gap of several decades between the disappearance of the synods and the appearance of the factions. Rather than ending as a result of a merger, the xystic synod met its end because the agonistic circuit collapsed. The donation of the Roman headquarters to the Church circa 430 seems to have coincided with the definite end of the synod.

The organizational structures of the athlete performers

In the fifth century, instead of an all-embracing association, there was organizational chaos, for athletes as well as artists, particularly on the international level. This leads to the question of how the growing group of athlete performers dealt with the challenges of the globalized entertainment sector of

[115] *Ep.* 1179–1183 (364) are addressed to governors. In *Ep.* 843 (388) he asks for a mediator, as the ambassadors of Antioch "need a helper for all matters in which the intervention of governors or others is necessary" (δέονται δὲ τοῦ πρὸς ἅπαντα βοηθήσοντος αὐτοῖς ὅσα τε ἀρχόντων δεῖται καὶ ὅσα τῶν ἄλλων).

[116] *Ep.* 1179 is most explicit about the transportation. [117] Roueché 1993: 57–60.

the Empire before they were supported by the factions. Interesting information in this respect can be deduced from a story told in the *Apophthegmata*.[118] An anonymous imperial official (τις μαγιστριανός) went to the governor's court in Tyre, capital of the late-antique province Phoenice, to request transportation to Constantinople. Among the people waiting for an audience with the governor was a group of *pammacharii*, who wanted to do the same trip, traveling from the one circus to the other, but who had had trouble getting admitted. When they saw the official, who because of his position had easy access, they asked him to plead on their behalf for a ship. The governor granted their request, on the condition that the official and the *pammacharii* traveled together. The *pammacharii* had to negotiate from a far weaker position than the Egyptian athletes for whom Libanius had requested transportation.[119] The career athletes of Libanius' letters were invited by the organizers of games and were spontaneously offered influential intermediates; the *pammacharii*, on the other hand, had problems getting through to the provincial administration and had to look for an intermediate themselves. The former were being asked, the latter pleaded. That even athlete performers eventually got transportation from the governor is nevertheless not too surprising. Games were vital to the life in the cities. An emperor would have looked kindly on a governor who sent him performers for the games in the capital.

An interesting detail is that the entire group consisted of athletes with the same specialty. At *agones* this type of cooperation would have been a disadvantage for most participants, as only one of the group could win. In the circus, however, several pairs of fighters were needed to compete at the same time. When working together, athlete performers could be hired more easily by circus directors and could travel more safely to other cities. Therefore, some of these men apparently worked together in troupes. These must have been private ventures, not structural and usually local. New members of a troupe could benefit from the experience of the older athletes, who passed on their knowledge. In this context it could even become interesting to train slaves as athletes: unlike at the *agones*, performances by slaves were not forbidden in the circus, and for the manager of a troupe training slaves could have economic advantages. The circus program of Oxyrhynchus calls such a troupe a '*xystos*'. As argued earlier in this chapter, the *xystos*, unlike the xystic synod, was not a formal association. Apparently, the end of the xystic synod did not mean the end of *xystos* as

[118] *Apophthegmata* 39 (ed. Nau 1907). [119] Libanius, *Ep.* 1179.

a broad term for the community of athletes. From this general meaning to the sense of 'athletic troupe' was in fact only a small step.

By the later fifth or early sixth century the factions expanded their range of professional interests. For most types of performers, for example pantomimes or *orchestopalarii* (wrestling-dancers), incorporation in a circus faction is well attested.[120] For athlete performers, the evidence is slim, but there is no reason to assume that the Green pankratiast Privatulus on the Kovacs vase was an exception.[121] There is also evidence for runners belonging to the factions in the tenth century.[122] Whereas Roueché argued that the incorporation of various performers into the circus factions is easier to understand if they took over existing organizations, I would argue the opposite: that the expansion of the factions offered an answer to a real need. Had the fifth-century artists and athletes belonged to a stable organization such as the synods, there would have been no incentive for an expansion of the factions. Whereas the synods had been able to function internationally through a dense and well-administrated network of branches, the late-antique athlete performers formed loosely organized groups with a permanent information deficit about what happened in the rest of the entertainment sector. In this time of organizational chaos, they could certainly benefit from the international connections of the faction directors. Probably, therefore, various troupes of athletes voluntarily joined the Blues and the Greens.

[120] E.g. IK Ephesos 2949: *orchestopalarii* of the Green faction. [121] Klose and Klein 2013.
[122] Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De ceremoniis* II 80 (71) – 81 (72) (ed. Vogt 1935).

CHAPTER 11

Athletics as an elite activity

Perceiving athletics in moral terms

In the fourth century the group of career athletes who competed in the *agones* decreased in size. In the fifth century athletic competitions were the hobby of only a small number of aristocrats. By the sixth century Malalas had to make a real effort to explain to his audience that the participants of the Antiochene Olympics were no poor athlete performers.[1] The decrease in the number of upper-class athletes was one of the natural consequences of the decrease in the number of *agones*. We cannot simply assume, however, that it was merely a consequence of that decline. It could also have worked the other way around: that this career lost its attractiveness among that part of the population that could afford it may also help to explain why the *agones* declined. This chapter therefore focuses on the perception of athletics as an activity in which it was acceptable or even admirable for the elite to engage.

The choice to practice Greek athletics had in fact never been self-evident, not even in its heyday. The traditionally substantial role of athletics in the elite lifestyle in the Greek East indeed struck outsiders as an odd custom. The Roman emperor Trajan remarked somewhat condescendingly that "those little Greeks do love their gymnasia,"[2] and the second-century Christian scholar Bardesanes of Edessa, an acquaintance of the Parthian king, characterized the Greeks as those "practicing athletics"[3] in a list of peoples and their somewhat bizarre habits. The question of why this particular custom had achieved an important role in the civic life of the eastern Mediterranean was difficult to answer even for those who engaged in it. Lucian, who as a classically schooled author from Samosata on the Euphrates could look at athletics both from the Greek and the outsider

[1] Malalas 12.10 (ed. Thurn 2000). [2] Pliny, *Ep*. 10.40: *Gymnasiis indulgent Graeculi*.
[3] Bardesanes Edessenus, *The Book of the Laws of Countries* 599 (ed. Drijvers 1964: 53).

perspective, treats this problem in his *Anacharsis*. Anacharsis, the Scythian sage, figures as the outsider surprised by the general respect for athletics in Athens. He finds it ridiculous that young men fight fiercely with each other for the sake of a crown of leaves and he considers their skill useless on the battlefield. His interlocutor is Solon, the embodiment of the Greeks and thus an enthusiastic supporter of the games. Although throughout the dialogue he never wavers in his belief in the importance of these exercises, in the end Solon does not succeed in convincing Anacharsis of their usefulness – nor does Lucian in the end convince the reader.[4] This comes as no surprise: athletics simply did not have direct practical use, beyond being healthy. The reason why people – at least those with the free time for it – nevertheless valued it lies in the norms and positive associations they connected to it.

The body is by nature 'unfinished'; the biological body with which people are born is developed into a social body through participation in social life – including sports. As sociologists such as Bourdieu have shown, different social environments will produce distinct bodily forms and accord their own values to these bodily forms; in general, there is a larger tendency among the dominant classes to spend time and money on the project of achieving a specific body.[5] Examples of modern valuations of specific body types and of certain bodily activities can offer a parallel that helps to understand how the association of virtues and vices with certain bodily types and activities works. People who run regularly are usually seen in a positive light in modern society, because many people associate this custom with tenacity and self-respect, in particular respect for one's own health. Body-building, on the other hand, is among these same sections of society often seen in a more negative light due to an association with vanity and illegal drugs. Fat bodies can be seen in a positive light because of associations with a jolly, homely atmosphere, but also in a negative light when linked to a lack of self-control. Of course, not everyone agrees with, for example, the positive valuation of running and of the slim and athletic body typical of people who regularly practice it. Within certain sections of society people nevertheless nowadays experience (often without acting on it) a social pressure to take up running or a similar sport, regardless of their personal likes and dislikes. The positive assessment of running is established in the shared cultural frame of reference of certain subsets of society. This social pressure is often reinforced by the popular media, but is not

[4] König 2005: 46–47, 80–96 discusses this dialogue in detail.
[5] Bourdieu 1979: 230–48; Shilling 2003: 111–20.

solely caused by it; the media too interact with the prevalent cultural frame of reference. The maker of a mainstream movie or TV show will, for example, present a character as slim and running, because the audience will more easily see him or her in a positive light, as an example of a self-respecting individual. To create this effect, they will less easily opt for a main character who does body-building, or has an above-average body mass index. In this way, reflections of these positive or negative perceptions in different media in turn confirm them, as part of an ongoing socialization process. The members of the late-antique urban elite under discussion were similarly engaged with the reigning norms and moral associations of their society, and participated in similar ongoing processes of socialization.

Traditional associations

Greek athletics was in origin an aristocratic occupation, because only aristocrats had the time and opportunity to train their bodies with all-round exercises. Though at first physical training no doubt had a military purpose, athletics became an alternative way to excel in times of peace, to convince others of one's credentials as an aristocrat. As in the famous line from the *Iliad*, a traditional ideal of the Greek aristocracy was "always to be the best and to be distinguished above the rest."[6] Athletic exercises made men look beautiful, that is well proportioned, fit, and strong, in a way that differed from the bodies of healthy men doing circumscribed and repetitive physical labor. The nudity that had become the standard sport outfit by the fifth century reinforced this visual separation between athletic bodies and bodies engaged in utilitarian physical activities. The athletic naked body indeed helped to situate people within society.[7] The fit and well-shaped body could hence become a goal in itself, a physical mark of nobility that contributed to aristocratic self-promotion. Parents hired athletic trainers to imbue their children with these physical marks of status.

Eventually, democratic tendencies spread the aristocratic agonistic and physical ideals across somewhat broader layers of the population. Masculine beauty, endurance, and eagerness to be the best became part of the image of the perfect citizen.[8] Citizens-to-be were taught athletics, because in this way the 'seeds of physio-psychological qualities' could be planted.[9] The ephebate,

[6] *Iliad* 6.208 and 11.784: αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων.
[7] See Gherchanoc 2008: 101. [8] See Papakonstantinou 2012: 1664.
[9] Term used by Pierre de Coubertin to express the value of sports in the same speech from 1918, which is also quoted at the beginning of this book: Coubertin 2000: 273.

originally created in fourth-century Athens as a military project for the preparation of future citizens to defend their city, evolved into an institutionalized form of athletic training popular across the eastern Mediterranean. After the ephebate the 'graduated' ephebes could, ideally, be recognized as members of the local elite by their perfect form (εὐεξία). A modern parallel that explains how this could work in practice may be found in ballet classes. A well-trained ballerina can even in other contexts be recognized by a particularly elegant and proud posture, which is conventionally associated with, in this case feminine, beauty. Because ballet is a rather upper-class pastime, the posture of a ballerina may also be supposed to give a girl or woman an elite look. Of course not all girls who take ballet classes achieve this elegant look, but it may be taken as something that many upper- and middle-class parents wish for their daughters, and that many little girls wish for themselves.

The positive perception of the male athletic body in the ancient world can be explained by its association with moral virtues. One of the central virtues in traditional Greek culture, and one which is prominent specifically in connection to athletic training, is the love of hard work, *philoponia*. This virtue is well illustrated by the allegory of 'the choice of Herakles': when offered the choice between on the one hand a pleasant and easy but inconspicuous life and on the other a hard but glorious life, Herakles chose the latter. One had to toil and deal with hardships in order to reach glory.[10] Equally, an athletic body does not come naturally, but requires a great amount of effort. At some ephebic competitions in the Hellenistic period there were special prizes for the young men who were most accomplished in three fields, namely in showing perfect form (εὐεξία), an exertion-loving attitude (φιλοπονία), and the best behavior (εὐταξία, later εὐκοσμία).[11] The last of these reflects the role of the ephebate in imbuing communal values – good behavior was not only monitored during the athletic training, but was also essential for the many civic feasts in which the ephebes participated as a symbolic representation of the citizens.[12] Individuality was equally stimulated. The competitive form in which the communities' appreciation for the ephebes' moral and athletic qualities was presented in fact reflects a fourth and quintessential quality: being better than all the others.

The institutionalization and spread of the gymnasium and ephebate was important for the transmission of these originally Greek associations

[10] This allegory by Prodicus is preserved in Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21–34.

[11] Εὐταξία, φιλοπονία, and εὐεξία. E.g. IK Sestos 1 l. 83, SEG 27.261 l. B 47, SEG 29.806 ll. 3–4. Cf. Crowther 1991.

[12] Hin 2007: 161–65.

throughout the Hellenistic world: founded by upper-class Greek immigrants, gymnasium and the ephebate possessed an elite character which attracted the local upper class, who in this way came in touch with the Greek ideals of excellence and masculine beauty, and in turn started to spread them. Athletics never spread among all strata of the population. Although the Hellenistic ephebate was open to all citizens, the voluntary program was not followed by all of them. The careful styling of the body and the ambition to become the best – a difficult and uncertain goal – remained pursuits for men of leisure. It was available to a considerable group of free men, but not to the poorest among them.

That the gymnasium and the ephebate never completely lost their elite character helps to explain why they still formed an important aspect of the urban lifestyle in the Roman period.[13] A perfected physique, especially among young men, along with the concomitant attitudes, continued to set them apart as members of the upper class. People did not go to large gymnasium complexes purely to wash themselves and exercise – they could as well have done that at home – but also to present themselves as members of the community. How they chose to behave in this public area was an (often unconscious) act of self-representation.[14] A hard, muscular body making aggressive movements was a safe choice in elite self-representation, as it was exactly the opposite of the image of the "sinewless, broken-down" bodies of dancers that were criticized as effeminate.[15] The antiquity of athletics had not yet rendered this seemingly useless practice irrelevant – quite the contrary. During the so-called Second Sophistic it was fashionable to engage with the classical past, and athletics as well as literature could serve as a means. The importance of athletics as an elite marker is easily underestimated in the light of the many literary works emphasizing a more intellectual self-representation; but these works stem from a relatively small intellectual subsection of the upper classes. Though a majority of the well-off male elite possessed at least a functional literacy, evidence from Egypt shows that even among the *decuriones*, due to a lack of higher education, many did not possess the cultural literacy of the preserved authors, and some were unable even to write at all, without feeling particularly ashamed about this.[16] A rhetorical career was only one type of cultural capital. Taking part in the ephebate, passing an afternoon exercising in the

[13] Van Nijf 2004.
[14] See Yegül 1992: 4 on the importance of bathing practices for the integration in Roman culture.
[15] Lada-Richards 2007: 69. [16] Benaissa and Remijsen 2014.

palaistra, or participating in *agones* were alternative markers of a masculine elite identity.[17]

While the ephebate or private athletic training were intended to imbue men with masculine beauty, self-control, or other qualities respected in society, athletic champions had actually mastered these qualities, and could be seen as their embodiments. Therefore, they were assessed positively by society at large – or at least by many of the leading citizens who left textual evidence and maintained a policy from which athletes benefitted. Athletes were praised for their beauty (κάλλος), their records (πρῶτος καὶ μόνος τῶν ἀπ' αἰῶνος), their toils (πόνοι, κάματοι), their endurance (καρτερία), and their self-control (σωφροσύνη).[18] Some were perceived as having the mental strength to endure strenuous training and abstain from pleasures of life such as sweets and sex.[19] Athletes were moreover praised as exemplary figures in whom physical and moral virtues were blended.[20] The literary culmination of all these virtues is Dio's Melankomas: "He had the good fortune to be from an illustrious family and to have beauty, and moreover courage, strength, and self-control, things that are truly the greatest of blessings. Indeed the most admirable thing in a man is to be unconquered not only by one's opponents, but also by toil, heat, hunger, and libido."[21] This positive image was not merely a literary construct, however. There was of course a distance between the ideal athlete and the actual competitors at the games – a difference which Philostratus in his *Gymnasticus* interprets and deplores as the decline of contemporary athletics – but victory odes and some inscriptions do attribute these virtues to contemporary competitors.[22] The best evidence that this positive perception was shared by an influential part of society is that cities officialized

[17] See Newby 2005, König 2005, and several contributions by van Nijf.

[18] E.g. Pindar, *Olympia* 10.103 (beauty); IAG 71 (record); IG XII 3.390 (toil); Merkelbach 1975: 146–47, l. 7 and IAph2007 12.719, l. 15 (φιλοπονία); Philostratus, *Heroicus* 678 (endurance); Merkelbach 1975: 146–47, l. 29 (self-control). For πόνος see also Robert 1960.

[19] Epictetus 3.15 says an athlete needs to abstain from cookies and train at fixed hours, in heat and cold. Plutarch, *Moralia* 710d and Aelian, *De natura animalium* 6.1 depict Kleitomachos as a man avoiding anything to do with sex. For the sexual abstinence of athletes see also Fiedler 1985.

[20] E.g. IAph2007 5.204, ll. 19–21: ἐν αὐτῷ πᾶσαν κεκρᾶσθαι τὴν ἀρετὴν ὅσην ψυχῆς ἐστιν καὶ σώματος; 12.719, ll. 16–17: ἐθαυμάσθη [τὴν φύ]σιν ψυχῆς τε ἐπιμελούμενος.

[21] Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 28.12.

[22] See previous notes. Though some honorary inscriptions mention virtues, most of them simply list victories. The most eloquent inscription with regard to virtues attributed to athletes, published in Merkelbach 1975: 146–47, is not an honorary inscription, but a decree of the athletic association for an athlete who died during the games in Naples. The occasion may explain the similarities with Dio's orations for Melankomas (*Or.* 28 and 29), who had also died in Naples. Cf. Robert 1968: 406–17.

their respect for athletes: from the archaic period on cities rewarded their local champions with privileges.

Of course, the prevalence of positive associations does not mean that each individual saw athletes in this light. Intellectuals, who as today were often not sports-minded, occasionally tried to understand why their society considered athletics important and found no reason for it. Looking beyond the common beliefs prevailing in society, they questioned the intuitively positive assessment of athletics by attacking its most problematic aspect: it had no well-defined purpose. Already in the late seventh century BC, the heyday of Sparta's success at the Olympics, Tyrtaeus distinguished between the fake virtue of the athlete and the true virtue of the soldier. This theme of the uselessness of athletics for war reappears in the second century AD *Anacharsis* of Lucian. Xenophanes, in the later sixth or early fifth century BC, complained that athletic victories did not contribute anything to the city. In his opinion a thinker such as himself contributed more and hence also deserved rewards. Euripides and Isocrates later argued along the same line.[23] Another aspect of competitive athletics which was criticized was the unhealthy lifestyle, especially the excessive eating. The stereotype of the gluttonous athlete, appearing already in the work of Euripides, was quite common. Doctors too, most famously Galen, objected to this aspect of the athlete's lifestyle.[24] Such criticism, although repeated over the centuries, had no real effect on general perceptions, or on the popularity of athletics. While intellectuals were complaining about its stupidity, the urban elite continued to exercise and taught their children to do the same. Of course, a generalized overview of so many centuries creates an artificial image of stability – the specific associations and body types, the intensity, the importance attached to it, and the subset of society that engaged in this activity would have been in constant flux – but in the Greek cultural sphere an upper section of society practiced athletics, assuming this was a good thing, from the archaic period to the Roman Empire. A change did happen from the third century onward, however.

[23] Tyrtaeus, Fr. 12, 1–16; Lucian, *Anacharsis* 31; Xenophanes, Fr. 2 (from Athenaeus 10.413); Euripides, *Autolycus* Fr. 282, 16–28 (also mocking the uselessness in battle); Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 1–2.

[24] Euripides, *Autolycus* Fr. 282, 4–6. Athenaeus 10.412 d–f applies the stereotype on Theagenes and Milon by listing what they ate according to legends. Galen deals with professional athletes most intensively in his *Protrepticus*. See for a discussion König 2005: 254–300. For a brief summary of the image of professional athletes in medical works see Schmidt 1993.

Changing customs in the gymnasium

The end of the gymnasium is usually placed in the early fourth century.[25] Consequently, the word γυμνάσιον is typically translated as 'gymnasium' in sources up to the early fourth century, but as 'baths' in later sources. By the early Byzantine period words such as 'gymnasium' or 'aleipterion' were indeed all just synonyms for 'baths'.[26] When exactly this shift took place, however, is impossible to determine. Gymnasiarchs, the liturgical officers who provided fuel and oil, are attested in Egypt until about 370, but their disappearance reflects only a change in financing. Perhaps the complexes were now leased to managers, who asked for a higher entrance fee, or were kept up with money from the provincial level, but financial changes alone do not imply a change in use of the bath complexes. The evolution of the gymnasium from a civic institute for the training of citizens and citizens-to-be to its later role as a public bathing facility was in fact very gradual and starts as early as the Hellenistic period.[27]

The traditional architectural form of the gymnasium was developed in the late fourth and third centuries BC: a building with wrestling-grounds, galleries where visitors could mingle, changing rooms, *aleipteria*, and *konisteria* where one could undress, rub the body with oil, and sprinkle it with dust before training, and simple bathing facilities to wash away the dirt afterwards. Extra rooms were often provided, because the citizen community also used the building for banquets, classes, speeches, festivals, and honorary monuments.[28] In general, however, the architectural form reflected the main purpose of the institution: the infrastructure for physical training formed the core. Already in the course of the Hellenistic period, the bathing facilities had nevertheless become somewhat more elaborate. This tendency strengthened under the influence of the design of Roman baths.

Roman baths differed from Greek gymnasia in that their main purpose was bathing and relaxation. Physical exercises likewise took place here, but mainly for reasons of health and pleasure, not as a part of citizen training. Both had a social role in the community, but while the gymnasium was actually meant as a civic institution, Roman baths just happened to stimulate contacts.[29] By the Hellenistic period, Greek and Roman bath

[25] Cameron 1976: 215–16; Roueché 1993: 137.
[26] Suidas, s.v. Γυμνάσια· ἀλειπτήρια ἢ βαλανεῖα ἢ λουτρά.
[27] Cf. Steskal 2007: 120: Gymnasia go through a 'Funktionswandel'.
[28] On the Hellenistic gymnasium see Kah and Scholz 2007, especially the papers of Scholz, Gehrke, Schuler, and Mango. For the architectural side see also Yegül 1992: 6–29.
[29] Yegül 1992: esp. 33–39.

architecture were influencing each other. The superior Roman technique for heating baths became common in Greek gymnasia, while palaistras were attached to Roman baths. In the first century AD this mutual influence led to the development of large bath–gymnasium complexes, which combined an extensive athletic infrastructure with large luxurious baths.[30] In these complexes or 'gymnasia' the institutional civic aspect became intertwined with the baths, creating a venue for relaxation and physical exercises of all kinds. In his *Lexiphanes*, Lucian describes a typical afternoon in such a complex. First, a group of men undressed to train. They then wrestled, boxed against a punching bag, or did muscle-strengthening exercises with weights. Afterwards they went into the baths, immersing themselves in the hot water as well as swimming like dolphins in the cold.[31] Relaxation had always been attractive – Aristophanes had already complained that young men preferred twittering in the public baths over training at the (at the time not yet monumentalized) palaistra[32] – but in the imperial period leisure came more clearly to the fore. Large cities often had several of these large complexes and the ephebate was organized in only one of them. In Athens, for example, the ephebes trained in the Diogeneion. Athletic trainers could no doubt be found in all the baths, but visitors of the imperial-age gymnasia came not only to exercise, but also to mingle with society, relax, chat, bathe, watch professional athletes, listen to performances of artists, or hear the new theories of visiting scholars.

While the architectural changes in the East represent a more relaxed attitude to exercising starting as early as the first century AD, this did not yet affect the positive perception of traditional athletic exercises. For this, we need to focus on the palaistra rather than on the entire complex. Palaistras were nominally wrestling-grounds, but already in the Hellenistic period they became multifunctional courtyards, with uses ranging from animated ball games, to performances by visiting athletes, artists, or teachers, to leisurely chatting. In some gymnasia, especially those without ephebes, such other uses may eventually have been more common than exercising in the traditional style. But even if exercising was not always the most common function, until the early third century it was evidently still perceived as the most important function, because it determined the layout of the palaistra.

This changed in the course of the third century: palaistras, which until then had always been present in the larger complexes, were sometimes abandoned (e.g. at Samos) or altered to better accommodate events other

[30] Yegül 1992: 250–56, 307–13; 2010: 155–59; Steskal 2007: 116–20. [31] Lucian, *Lexiphanes* 5.
[32] Aristophanes, *Nubes* 1044–1054.

than athletics (e.g. by the addition of an auditorium or by the replacement of water basins with benches in two gymnasia in Ephesus). That the needs of the athletes no longer determined the layout of palaistras shows that exercising was no longer thought crucial. While in the early Empire a considerable group of relatively well-to-do citizens trained vigorously in the palaistra so that they could present themselves to the community as having a beautiful masculine body, or at least the exertion-loving attitude necessary to obtain this type of beauty, third-century bathing practices suggest that fewer people found it important to present themselves as such. One may assume that the number of people naturally inclined toward physical exercise remained more or less constant, but the number of people experiencing social pressure to practice athletics must have diminished. In the fourth century this evolution is concluded. Although a hard surface is ill-suited for athletics – especially for wrestling, *pankration*, and the long jump – several palaistras were now paved. New bathhouses no longer received a palaistra.[33] Although occasionally used metaphorically, 'palaistra' disappears as the normal word for an architectural structure.

At the same time, the consensus that athletics was a valuable lesson for children dissolved. The earlier consensus had been most clearly reflected in the existence of an institutionalized program of athletic education for future citizens, the ephebate. The abandonment of this institution in the early fourth century required no formal decision of the city council, as the city did not have a major role in the organization of the ephebate in the imperial period. Instead it was financed by the class who took part in it. Most offices were either filled by ephebes themselves or by older family members. The nomination by the city was *pro forma*; they approved candidates, but did not look for them.[34] Therefore, the disappearance of the ephebate implies that too few people found the program important enough to invest in it.

Interestingly, the last attestations of the ephebate postdate the third-century decline of athletic exercises in the gymnasium. The short and interrupted duty of the Antinoopolite *kosmetes* in 347[35] could suggest

[33] Yegül 1992: 307–13; 2010: 181–83.

[34] On the relation between city and ephebate and on the end of the Athenian ephebate: Wiemer 2011: 510–15 and 518–28 respectively. I agree with his view that an education that socialized the youth as local citizens was no longer in demand in the fourth century. His argumentation, however, which focuses on the disappearance of local coins and *agones*, sometimes confuses the disappearance of evidence with a disappearance of practices.

[35] P.Ant. I 31.

that, at that time and place, masculine beauty was no reason to take part in the ephebate: if the training was limited to two short periods spread over the year, the ephebes could no longer receive the intensive physical training necessary to obtain such form. Other benefits of this program, such as the transmission of communal values, may explain why it survived these first challenges.

The marginalization of athletics in the gymnasium did not entail the end of the gymnasium as a place for leisure and social contact. Public bathing remained popular.[36] The baths continued to be a kind of civic institution, as the upkeep of the accommodation was a service provided for by notables of the local community.[37] Some baths still functioned as a meeting place for civic associations, such as the *gerousia*.[38] In general, however, such associations seem to have been past their prime. As before, playful physical exercises were part of the bathing experience. The end of the ephebate in the early fourth century did not mean that all boys became weak and unathletic. Many young people continued to derive pleasure from physical activities, but they found this in other types of games, such as ball-playing. When Himerius called back his students after a period of absence, he told them to exchange their balls for pens.[39] The paved courtyards that replaced the traditional palaistras were better suited for these kinds of games than for wrestling or *pankration*. In baths at Hammat Gader near the Sea of Galilee, a verse inscription on the renovation after an earthquake in the mid fifth or early sixth century mentions the creation of a 'playground'.[40] Athletics, though not central as before, had not disappeared completely. Even though many adults were exercising less, some children in the course of the fourth century still attended athletic training sessions as part of their formation, as will be discussed in the next section. In Constantinople, athletic trainers were still employed in sixth-century baths. The heroic bath attendant of general Bouzes, for example, was an athletics trainer

[36] Yegül 1992: 314–49.

[37] Liebeschuetz 1972: 156 argues that the declining finances of the city caused the end of the gymnasium: "It cannot be chance that the evidence for the gymnasia and their officials fades out just in the years when the civic estates and taxes were finally confiscated." The evidence from elsewhere shows that there is not such a brusque end as might be suggested in the material for Antioch alone. Gymnasia became baths and did still require oil and fuel. As these were mostly paid by liturgists, a direct link between the end of the cities' resources and the end of the gymnasium as a city institution is unlikely. That the decline of the city's involvement in the baths more or less coincided with decreasing resources was not mere chance, though, as they were both connected to the increasing centralization in the Empire, see Chapter 12.

[38] Yegül 1992: 312; Lewin 1995.

[39] *Or.* 69.7.

[40] SEG XXXVI 1343: l. 5: στορέσας φιλοπαίγμονα θήκετο χῶρον.

(*paidotribes*).[41] In general, the early Byzantine attitude to the body was characterized by an approval of moderate exercising for health reasons. This society still appreciated the qualities of self-control and a love of hard work, but had found other ways to imbue young men with them.[42]

Teaching children to excel

Like any other sport, the ball games played by active late-antique youngsters would have contributed to their formation as rounded and well-socialized adults. Playing ball may have, for example, taught them to cooperate in teams or quickly to assess complex situations with multiple actors. This type of educational value, however, was not the reason why athletics formed a considerable part of the elite education before the third century AD. Greek athletics consisted of a set of individual and competitive sports that primarily taught the boys something very different: a personal drive to become the best. The importance of excelling was taught to elite boys in various ways, for example by means of literature on exemplary figures. Individual competitive sports, however, were the most practical and direct way to imbue children with an agonistic drive. The centrality of the ideal of excellence to the education of young elite boys in the Greek East should not be underestimated. It was not just the private athletic training for rich children that focused on the, by nature individual, disciplines of athletics and stimulated participation in *agones*. Even in the Hellenistic and imperial ephebate, an institution that in other respects pursued mainly communal values – e.g. through the participation of the ephebes in civic processions or through emphasizing discipline and behavior[43] – individual competition was a central element. In the third century, when athletics was already losing popularity as an activity at the baths, ephebic contests are still well attested. In fact, one of the only things we know for certain about the early fourth-century ephebate is that the ephebes still publicly competed against each other.[44] When the ephebate

[41] Procopius, *De Bellis* 1.13.29–38 (on events in 530). For training in Constantinople see also Suidas, s.v. Μέναν δρος.

[42] Industry was of course also stimulated at school. The virtue of *philoponia* is therefore mentioned in several writing exercises, e.g. SB XXIV 15905, XXVI 16520. For asceticism as a new type of self-control, see pp. 272ff.

[43] Cf. Beck 2009: The program of the ephebate, in particular the role of the ephebes in certain festivals, illustrates what the city valued most, in particular with respect to its history. Wiemer 2011: 499–510, 515–18: The purpose of the imperial-age ephebate was to socialize the youth. The idea of rank was well developed, as some boys took up all kinds of offices during the ephebate.

[44] Libanius, *Or.* 1.23; P.Oxy. I 42.

ended, the ambition to be the best became less central in the education of the next generations, as did the value of discipline. It was not replaced by a new form of citizen education. On the playing fields of the baths, or in the circuses and theaters of the city, boys would have had no trouble finding new activities to fill their newly acquired free time without adult supervision. Since the emphasis on discipline was absent here, the end of the ephebate has even been connected to the rise of hooliganism in late antiquity.[45]

Not all families stopped valuing athletics as a means to achieve excellence, however. The ambition to be the best is by its nature a rather elitist pursuit. The urban elite under discussion in this chapter was a broad and heterogeneous group and so differences within this group need to be taken into account. Whereas the ephebate had formed a broad elite, private training formed gentlemen. The ephebate had usually taken up only one year (or even less) in the life of a teenager, but boys from more privileged families had always started training at a younger age and were more thoroughly trained. Therefore, they had better odds of reaching the high level of competition of the international *agones*, and so to become the best. A good private education did not come cheap, though, so after the ephebate had come to its end, the group of youngsters trained in the traditional forms of Greek athletics became smaller and more aristocratic.

Since all texts on *paideia* were written by teachers of letters and are thus naturally biased toward the intellectual side of education, the role of private physical training in late-antique education is difficult to quantify. The young Alexandrian Dioskoros was called "wise in the arts of the Muses and a new Herakles" on his epitaph in the Constantinian age, which suggests that, at least for some, both sides of education remained important.[46] In 364, Libanius praised two Egyptian brothers who honored Hermes with rhetorical exercises as well as with wrestling. One of them was victorious in the athletic contests of Antioch.[47] As late as 388 Libanius wrote proudly that one of his students was going to participate in the running competition of the Antiochene Olympics, but deserved a crown for his intellectual pursuits as well.[48] Even though it is not clear how common athletic education was, it evidently still existed throughout the fourth century, as is likewise shown by occasional references to *paidotribai* and by the existence of boy athletes belonging to the higher strata of society. Several victors on the bronze plate from Olympia won in the category of the boys,

[45] Roueché 1993: 135–40. [46] I.Métr.Ég. 82. [47] *Ep.* 1278, 1279. [48] *Ep.* 843.4; 1017.3.

among them the two Athenian brothers who won in 381 and 385.[49] Such boys were of course the most talented of all the boys who were training; Libanius refers to such talents as "those who have become famous in the palaistras."[50] Not all who trained with a *paidotribes* became athletes, though. Isidorus of Pelousion observed this in about 400 in a letter to the grammarian Agathodaimon, remarking that, although education could make the most talented children very competent, many children just made progress.[51] After the fourth century there is barely any evidence for athletics as a part of education, suggesting that parents no longer found it particularly important to pass this competence on to their children.

Praising athletic virtues in late antiquity

Ancient authors are silent on the changes in the habits of exercising we have deduced from architectural changes. In retrospect, their silence is surprising, as these changes symbolize the end of a century-long practice, but in the third and fourth centuries visitors would not have experienced this as a significant change: throughout their lives, they had seen palaistras as multifunctional spaces, and the paved palaistras of renovated gymnasia and the smaller courtyards of new baths were equally suitable for most of the acquired functions of the palaistra. Therefore, the evolution was not only unlamented, it was not even considered notable.[52]

Greek texts instead offer a picture of continuity. The association with moral qualities, known from the traditional texts with which late-antique authors were engaging, continues to resound at least until the early fourth century. A rhetorical handbook from the third or fourth century, for example, advises mentioning legendary athletes as a source of inspiration when exhorting competitors. The author observes that these famous athletes of old became the men they were through self-control, self-discipline, and training (ἀπὸ σωφροσύνης, ἀπὸ ἐγκρατείας, ἀπὸ ἀσκήσεως).[53]

[49] Ebert 1997. [50] *Ep.* 843: τοῖς ἐν ταῖς παλαίστραις εὐδοκιμοῦσι. [51] *Ep.* 1671.

[52] See Cameron 1976: 216: "The gymnasium died a natural death unlamented even by the few remaining Hellenes of the day." Basil, *Ep.* 74 does in fact lament the closed gymnasia (γυμνάσια κεκλεισμένα) in or shortly after 371, but the context shows that his complaint is not about the end of the gymnasia, but about the lack of publicly financed oil due to problems brought on by the splitting of Cappadocia into two provinces. He therefore connects the closing of the gymnasia (read 'baths') with lampless nights, which were also due to the lack of oil.

[53] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ars rhetorica* 7.292: a chapter on the 'προτρεπτικὸς ἀθληταῖς' (in Teubner edition of Dionysius of Halicarnassus).

Similar reflections of these traditional perceptions are found in inscriptions. Although there are only a few late-antique inscriptions for athletes, these are more informative in this respect than many earlier monuments, because the new literary style of these short texts invited a more eloquent description of qualities than did the old straightforward lists of victories. Athletes were associated with self-imposed toils (*philoponia*) and self-control (*sophrosyne*), just like their predecessors. The late third-century *agonothetes* Makarios of Miletus was for example called "president of toils" (καμάτων ἀθλοθέτης) in an honorary inscription disguised as building inscription.[54] Under Constantine, Cl. Rufus alias Psapharios, the last of the Apollonii to be high priest of the athletic association, "toiled in athletics together with his colleagues" (ἐν τῇ ἀθλήσει συνέκαμαν) according to the stelae recording his donation.[55] The people erecting such monuments represent a select group of literati, whose education kept them in touch with the traditional ideals. Macedonius Consul, one of the early Byzantine epigrammatic poets playing with classical language and themes, even created a victory epigram for the invented boy athlete Thyonichos – a name taken from Theocritus – as late as the mid sixth century, emphasizing the same traditional virtues: "This is he who did not bend his leg from fatigue, but conquered every opponent in the contest."[56]

From the later fourth century on, however, it apparently became less convincing to praise real athletes by referring to these virtues. The monument for John of Smyrna (circa 390) avoids mentioning specific moral qualities: the athlete is instead praised vaguely for his "strength and virtue combined" (*ob fortitudinis merita et virtutis cumulum*).[57] Especially from the fifth century on, the authors had to contend with the now-standard image of the athlete as a performer whose social status made him unfit to embody virtues. Malalas pictured the competitors of the Antiochene Olympics in a seemingly traditional light, namely as rich, noble youths whom he lauded for their *sophrosyne*, but his almost exaggerated insistence on their good behavior and chastity shows that he expected his audience to imagine athletes differently. Centuries later, Niketas Choniates similarly had to stress the age and class of his young competitors and the innocent and playful character of the contest to differentiate the athletes under discussion from the contemporary stereotype.[58]

[54] IvMilet I 339, C2 = Steinepigramme I 01/20/16. [55] IGUR I 246, B14.
[56] *Anthologia Planudea* 51. Translation from Madden 1995: no. 41.
[57] CIL VI 10153 = IGUR I 245.
[58] Malalas 12.10 (ed. Thurn 2000); Niketas Chionates, *Historia* 509 (ed. van Dieten 1975).

Some authors wanting to praise late-antique career athletes avoided any reference to the specific virtues, which were traditionally associated with athletics, but which were now, in the eyes of at least part of their audience, no longer connected to it. Yet their new strategy to depict athletes still managed to allude to classical literature. Imperial-age writings, especially Pausanias' books on Olympia, contains numerous stories about famous athletes from the past, for example of how Poulydamas (fifth century BC) killed a lion with his bare hands in imitation of Herakles.[59] Such legendary stories had not been told about contemporary athletes in the earlier Empire, but this now changed. The Olympic victor list, which records several of these traditional stories, has an appendix from about AD 400 adding that Philoumenos of Philadelphia allegedly struck a bronze statue with his hand and made a serious dent in it.[60] The story of how the Armenian prince and boxing champion Varazdates was honored in Olympia for killing lions seems inspired by the legends involving Poulydamas.[61] Procopius, who could no longer meet real-life champions of the agonistic circuit, made up his own athletic hero. His story of the close combat between the *paidotribes* Andreas and a Persian giant, which turned into a wrestling match, is a literary reference to Poulydamas' legendary fight with three of Darius' bodyguards, known as 'immortals'.[62]

The vanity of a well-trained body

Customs, institutions, and texts suggest that by the early fourth century men of leisure found athletic exercises and an athletic body less important than before. There were still people who trained vigorously, but this seems a smaller group than in the early Empire. Broad public support for an educational program with a strong athletic focus and for the availability of a wrestling-ground within the urban infrastructure had faded. Apparently, it was no longer self-evident that this activity had any benefits on the level of attitudes, despite its practical uselessness. Asking why the perception changed means asking which new associations overshadowed the old ones.

[59] Pausanias 6.5 (Poulydamas), 6.14.5–8 (Milon), etc.

[60] Eusebius, *Chronica* App. (ed. Christesen and Martirosova-Torlone 2006).

[61] Moses Chorenensis, *History of the Armenians* 3.40: "This Varazdat was young in years, spirited, personable, strong, full of all deeds of valor, and very expert at archery. Earlier he had fled from Shapuh to the emperor's court and had become a noted champion – first by winning the pugilistic contest at Pisa; and then at Heliopolis in Hellas at midday he had killed lions, for which he was praised and honored by the contestants at the Olympic games." Translation from Armenian by Thomson 1978.

[62] *De Bellis* 1.13.29–38. For Poulydamas and the 'immortals' see Pausanias 6.5.7.

As the gradual evolution of the gymnasium was stimulated by Roman bathing customs, a good starting point for this query are the different perceptions of athletic training and the athletic body that traditionally reigned in the West. In the republican period the Roman mistrust of athletics was strong. It fitted into a general skepticism about Greek habits, including the love for the beautiful male body. Athletics, a form of physical contact between naked men, was associated with homosexuality and pederasty. In the words of Cicero: "To me this habit [of pederasty] seems to be born in the exercises of the Greeks, in which those loves are admissible and permitted. Ennius spoke rightly: 'The beginning of disgrace is to strip the body naked among citizens.'"[63] Eventually, however, the Roman worry about nudity and homosexuality eased.

Latin moral discourse criticized the uselessness of athletics in a way that was similar to Greek intellectual discourse. The opposition between fake athletic virtue and real military virtue was a central theme: physical training, that is anything beyond the moderate exercises that conduced to health, had to have a purpose; as athletics did not prepare men for war, athletic training was pointless. An important element in the opposition between athletes and military men was the difference in lifestyle: unlike the soldier, the athlete could not do without regular portions of food or sufficient sleep. The self-control of the athletes is in this case understood as a weakness: he is a slave of his routine and cannot perform without it.[64]

Late-antique panegyrics still play with these *topoi*. Julian – who as a prince underwent physical training from the age of eight to fourteen, when he lived in Cappadocia[65] – distinguishes in a panegyric on his cousin Constantius the princely physical education from the training of athletes and stresses its military nature: Constantius was trained in dancing in armor, running in armor, and riding. Julian explicitly says that the typical

[63] E.g. Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* 4.70 (35): *Mihi quidem haec in Graecorum gymnasiis nata consuetudo videtur, in quibus isti liberi et concessi sunt amores. Bene ergo Ennius: 'Flagiti principium est nudare inter civis corpora'.*

[64] This argument, obviously borrowed from Greek criticism, can be found already in Euripides' *Autolycus* (Fr. 282). There is an overview of Roman opinions on athletics in Mähl 1974: 21–29, 40–54, and (shorter) in Newby 2005: 38–44.

[65] Sozomen 5.2.10: ἔνθα δὴ θεραπείας καὶ ἀγωγῆς βασιλικῆς ἠξιοῦντο, καὶ μαθήμασι καὶ γυμνασίοις τοῖς καθ' ἡλικίαν ἐχρῶντο; Julian, *Or*. 5.3 (no. Budé): ἐν ταῖς λαμπραῖς οἰκετείαις τρεφόμενοι καὶ τοῖς ἡμῶν αὐτῶν δούλοις ὥσπερ ἑταίροις συγγυμναζόμενοι. Γυμνάζω could refer to all types of physical and intellectual exercises, but the opposition with μάθημα (i.e. intellectual training) and the fact that they trained with slaves as their partners (sparring partners are indispensable for wrestling and other sports, but not essential for studying) do suggest that physical training is meant.

muscular body of palaistra-aficionados did not suit a king.[66] Panegyrics for other emperors similarly stress the military element of their training. When Ausonius praised Gratian in 379, he mentioned both his moral and his physical accomplishments; the sports the emperor supposedly excelled in were wrestling, javelin-throwing at a mark, and riding.[67] Valentinian I was compared by Ammianus Marcellinus to the famous sixth-century BC wrestler Milon of Kroton: he was said to be equally good at wrestling, but, with the same insistence as Julian, "in the way of soldiers" (*militum more*).[68] These Latin and Greek *literati* apparently thought that picturing the emperor as an athlete could create a suspicion of weaknesses among their late-antique audiences. This does not prove, however, that athletic training was absent from court – the Olympic boxing victor and Armenian prince Varazdates was raised at the court of Valens[69] – nor that Greek-style athletics had become unacceptable as an element in the self-representation of other members of the elite. As discussed in Chapter 9, participation in *agones* had never been a normal component of imperial propaganda.

If we shift our attention to practices, it is clear that, despite the criticisms in literature, athletics spread in the later Republic and in the imperial age as a popular pastime in the Roman baths, which increasingly incorporated palaistras. Greek culture was not only exotic – with the suspicion of immorality that this word sometimes carries – but also fashionable. An acquaintance with Greek athletics had by the early Empire become a hallmark of the elite, which could be demonstrated by wrestling in the palaistra, but equally by athletic art in one's house.[70] Though this may have led to more positive associations with the athletic male body, the social pressure to conform never became as strong as in the East – this may be linked to negative Roman associations with public performances, which will be discussed in Chapter 13. Athletic training was never institutionalized as part of the citizen education or taken to the professional level of the career athlete. Exercising was above all seen as healthy,[71] which is not unlike the attitude to exercising in the late-antique East. This similarity does not automatically mean, however, that the western attitude was consciously taken over: whereas for the upper classes in the West, Greek traditions had the connotation of 'high culture', this was not the same the other way around. If the elite in the East – who had happily ignored

[66] *Or.* 1.7: ἥκιστα βασιλεῖ πρέπειν ὑπολαβὼν τῶν τὰς παλαίστρας κατειληφότων τὴν θρυλλουμένην εὐεξίαν.
[67] *Ad Gratianum gratiarum actio pro consulatu* 14.
[68] Ammianus Marcellinus 30.7.2–3.
[69] Moses Chorenensis, *History of the Armenians* 3.40.
[70] Newby 2005: 134–40.
[71] Mähl 1974: 21.

Roman perceptions of athletic exercises for four centuries – by the fourth century did show openness to the idea that intensive athletic training may not be so admirable after all, this means that their own value-set was under pressure.

Another potential cause for the changing attitude toward the practice of athletics is the introduction of specifically Christian perceptions. Christianity, however, did not come with its own set of associations for bathing and exercising. In day-to-day life, Christians were barely distinguishable from pagans. In the well-known words of the letter to Diognetus they did not differ from other people "in where they lived, in their language, or in their customs."[72] Though the author does not specify this, we can assume that early Christians thus followed the rest of society when it came to bathing practices and exercising. When engaged in these activities, they were first and foremost members of their local community and shared the perceptions that were dominant there. It is therefore not surprising that Christian attacks on practicing athletics are rare in the East. Eastern Christians had after all grown up in a world in which the practice of athletics was taken for granted. Clement of Alexandria (circa 150–215) found it perfectly acceptable that Christians visited the baths for reasons of cleanliness and health, as long as these visits happened not too frequently and not for pleasure alone. This view was shared by other church fathers.[73] In the fourth century new bathing complexes were built by Christian sponsors.[74] Athletic exercises were met with a similar tolerance. Already in the first century, Paul had acknowledged in the First Letter to Timothy that physical exercises had some use – although of course not as much as spiritual training.[75] Clement similarly considered it healthy for boys to exercise in the palaistra, as they could strengthen their bodies by wrestling or ball games.[76] Late-antique pedagogical treatises such as *De inani gloria et de educandis liberis* of John Chrysostom focus on moral development and ignore physical education, but the typically Christian names of some athletes, for example John, imply that athletic training was, at least for some families, compatible with a Christian upbringing. The rare instances

[72] See *Epistula ad Diognetum* (SC 33bis) 5: Χριστιανοὶ γὰρ οὔτε γῇ οὔτε φωνῇ οὔτε ἔθεσι διακεκριμένοι τῶν λοιπῶν εἰσιν ἀνθρώπων. Etc. (2nd c.)

[73] Clement, *Paedagogus* 2.2.1; 3.9. For more references see Ader 2003: 48. Giatsis 1989: 166 also lists some fleeting remarks of the Church fathers on bodily care, which suggest that like bathing, moderate physical exercises were considered healthy.

[74] Koch 1978: 317–18.

[75] 1 Timothy 4.8: ἡ γὰρ σωματικὴ γυμνασία πρὸς ὀλίγον ἐστὶν ὠφέλιμος, ἡ δὲ εὐσέβεια πρὸς πάντα ὠφέλιμός ἐστιν, ἐπαγγελίαν ἔχουσα ζωῆς τῆς νῦν καὶ τῆς μελλούσης.

[76] Clement, *Paedagogus* 3.10.

of explicit criticism focus – as in the works of pagan moralists – on professional athletes. Clement, for example, objected to their lifestyle, in particular to their excessive diet. The most negative voice is Tatian (AD 160–180), who, styling himself as a barbarian outsider in his *Address to the Greeks*, reacts to different aspects of Greek culture in an attempt to make the difference between pagans and Christians relevant to all areas of life. He mocks the 'body-builder' figure of professional athletes and condemns the violence of combat sports.[77] In the works of western Christians, who were raised to be more skeptical about athletics, one finds lengthier criticisms. In his *On Spectacles* (circa 200) Tertullian styled the combat sports violent, the other sports pointless (*vanus*), and the build and excessive diet of the athletes unnatural. Novatian (circa 250) also detested the gluttony of the athletes and, with stronger emphasis than before, the emptiness of athletics. Lactantius (300–310) wrote that one had to laugh at the absurdity of almost-crazy people such as athletes.[78]

The most common criticisms of professional athletes, namely of their high calorie intake and their exaggerated and uselessly bulky muscles, are taken over almost directly from the treatises of earlier pagan moralists. Only the objection that athletics, in particular the popular combat sports, was too violent may be founded in Christian ideals. This argument is not completely unknown in pagan treatises,[79] but in Christian polemics it can be found already in the second century, in the East (Tatian) as well as the West (Tertullian). Later it returns in the insistence of Severus of Antioch on the bestial character of combat sports.[80] The uselessness of athletics again is a criticism attested in both Roman and Greek moralizing treatises, but the focus here lies less on its lack of practical use than on its spiritual emptiness (expressed in both treatises *On Spectacles* by the word *vanus*). According to Tertullian, professional athletes tried to outdo God's work with their effort to achieve such artificial form.[81] He focused, as had all moralists before him, on competitive athletics. Novatian took over this idea of Tertullian's, but seems to have developed it a bit further. He wrote "if you remove the public, you expose the emptiness."[82] This suggests that while an *agon* at least had the purpose of entertainment, athletics in itself was pointless. By the hypothetical removal of the public, he widens his scope beyond professional athletics towards exercising as part of the

[77] *Oratio ad Graecos* 23.
[78] Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 18; Novatian, *De spectaculis* (CC SL 4) 8; Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 1.21.45.
[79] Libanius, *Or*. 64.119. [80] *Hom*. 91 (PO 25), 25. [81] Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 18.
[82] Novatian, *De spectaculis* 8.2: *Denique remove spectatorem, reddideris vanitatem*.

traditional lifestyle. A new morality can be perceived in particular in Novatian's objection to the indecency of the grips and of the rolling on the ground on top of each other, which reflects the idea of sexual shame.[83] Yet this problematization of the emptiness and indecency of athletics was not specifically Christian, but fits into a broader late-antique change.

A number of late-antique trends, including the rise of mystical and eschatological religions and the development of a new set of values, have been linked to a broad change of 'mood': from the third century on, people in the Roman Empire seem increasingly to have turned inward. It is not simple to explain why this happened – perhaps the Antonine plague and the political and military malaise of the third century stimulated a feeling of insecurity – but for the purpose of this book it suffices to observe some of the changes and to assess their influence of the perception of athletics. As described by Peter Brown, this new late-antique mood was characterized by a heightened sensitivity to the discrepancy between the physical world and higher powers.[84] People became, in other words, more sensitive to the divine and consequently more aware of their own insignificance. Both pagans and Christians, for example, refer more frequently to god in private letters on papyrus from the third century on. This new awareness perhaps stirred their need to defend their own identity by drawing sharper boundaries around it. People started to attach more importance to their private lives and experiences. Behavior was guided by stricter moral norms – or by interiorized ones[85] – particularly in the field of family and sexuality. Prudent behavior (σωφροσύνη) had always been valued, especially for women, but now came even more to the fore, among pagans as well as Christians. While, certainly for men, σωφροσύνη had traditionally meant self-control – that is the strength to abstain from, for example, certain kinds of food or from sexual intercourse before competition – now the concept was more and more connected to the idea of sexual shame and chastity. This feeling of shame also found an architectural expression in the conversion of the *cubiculum* to a more private room.[86]

[83] Novatian, *De spectaculis* 8.2: *Quam foeda praeterea ipsa luctamina: vir infra virum iacens amplexibus inhonestis et nexibus implicatur. In tali certamine [stare] viderit quis vincat, pudor victus est*. "How revolting are these bouts! One man clings with indecent holds and embraces to another man who lies beneath him. In such a contest there may be a question as to who the winner is – modesty is always the loser." Translation by DeSimone 1974: 130.

[84] Brown 1971a: 51–56. Other works on this theme are Brown 1982 and 1988 or Veyne 1978. Most literature on this sensitivity and interiorization focuses on the new religiosity. More references in Stroumsa 2005: 26 and 37 (for this idea in the work of Foucault).

[85] Veyne 1978: esp. 47–48.

[86] Dossey 2012: 197.

This sensitivity to the divine and the related diminution of one's own importance is reflected in the rise of asceticism, a lifestyle that denied all worldly physical needs in order to make a connection with the otherworldly. Already in the early Empire some philosophers and sects practiced a lifestyle aimed at conquering passions such as hunger, libido, and ambition in pursuit of purity of the soul, but at that time asceticism was still regarded as a 'subversive' virtue and disapproved of by many.[87] It was not a value shared by the community. From the third century on, public support for asceticism grew, among pagans as well as Christians. In Christian communities the choice of perpetual sexual renunciation – that is the choice not to produce new citizens – became a more normal option.[88] Of course only a fraction of the population consisted of such extreme ascetics. An increase in private luxury in fact suggests that the less ascetically inclined reacted to the new feelings of uncertainty about the future by investing more in the enjoyment of the here and now. Nevertheless, the positive perception of the ascetic lifestyle among broad sections of the population, including among those who did not renounce worldly pleasures themselves, shows that asceticism was an essential part of the late-antique value-set. Some extreme ascetics became popular heroes, especially from the fourth century on in Asia, Syria, and Egypt. Their ascetic lifestyle was associated with a great power over demons, and their position outside society lent authority to their advice. People were excited to meet famous ascetics in the same way as others gushed about successful charioteers. Children would even play out scenes with hermits exorcising demons.[89]

At first glance, a positive perception of asceticism may seem easily combinable with a positive perception of athletics, as a high valuation of self-control is central to both. In his defence of Greek literature, Basil even used the traditional choice of Herakles to distinguish between, on the one hand, a life focused on artificial beauty and pleasure and, on the other, the good Christian lifestyle with hard work leading to eternal life.[90] 'Asceticism' moreover is etymologically connected to the word for physical training (ἄσκησις). Professional athletics and asceticism have different approaches to self-control, however. Christians did not take the word ἄσκησις directly from the athletic vocabulary, as is sometimes suggested;[91]

[87] Term from Francis 1995: xiii–xvi. For pagan forms of asceticism see also Finn 2009: 9–33.
[88] Brown 1988: 190–92, 202. In this complete abnegation of sex Christian asceticism differs from the pagan version, see MacMullen 1986b: 342–43.
[89] Brown 1971b on the authority of holy men. For children playing demon and monk see Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa* (SC 234) 9.9. See also Brown 1988: 325.
[90] Basil, *De legendis gentilium libris* 5.55–77. [91] E.g. Ader 2003: 44.

the metaphorical meaning of ἄσκησις, 'disciplining the mind', was well established in pagan philosophical literature from Democritus and Protagoras onward, and was particularly common in Stoic works.[92] The ascetic, moreover, fights his body and subjects it to his mental power, whereas in the athlete the relation between body and mind was ambiguous. On the one hand he was a stronghold of self-control: the constant training, the abstinence from sexual intercourse before the contests, and a controlled diet all subjected the body to the will of the athlete. On the other hand, the obsession of the athlete with the perfect body and his excessive intake of food rich in proteins to develop muscles (ἀναγκοφαγεῖν) denied the priority of the soul over the body. The mixed intellectual responses to professional athletics reflect this ambiguity: some praised examples of self-control such as Melankomas, while others objected to the athletic life-style.[93] The athlete was not an ascetic. Although both lifestyles were based on persistent training and self-control taken to unhealthy extremes, they aimed at opposite effects. The professional athlete abstained from certain physical pleasures in order to become a victor in physical contests, while the ascetic subdued all kinds of lusts in order to win the metaphysical contest that was life. Why the image of the athlete could nevertheless serve as a metaphor for the ascetic will be discussed later. Real-life athletes would always fall short in comparison to the new paragons of self-control.

The new heroes even discredited the physical ideal of the athletic body. The spiritual athlete was not supposed to take pride in his looks. Spending hours a day to develop useless muscles was a vain pursuit. Ascetic monks are said to have refrained from bathing.[94] Ascetic bodies, constantly on the edge of starvation, looked very different from athletic bodies. Archaeological excavations at Minya in Middle Egypt made it possible to examine the skeleton of Apa Bane, an ascetic from the second half of the fourth century who, according to the Coptic *Apophthegmata Patrum*, lived for eighteen years standing up in a completely dark cell, fasting strictly. The medical examination of the remains showed that, because of the continuous standing, he had acquired not only highly developed muscles – just like an actual athlete – but also a painful deformation of his spine with several vertebrae grown together, which strongly limited his mobility. If he had fallen, he would never have been able to get up by himself.[95]

[92] Dressler 1947 (*non vidi*); Hijmans 1959: 54–56; Francis 1995: xvii–xviii.
[93] See e.g. König 2005: esp. 97–157 and 274–300.
[94] For monks refraining from bathing, e.g. Jerome, *Vita S. Hilarionis* (SC 508) 4, Athanasius, *Vita S. Antonii* (SC 400) 47. Cf. Markschies 2004: 194.
[95] Markschies 2004: 202–04.

The rise of asceticism alone cannot explain why Greek athletics disappeared. It does explain the growth in the number of people for whom the association between athletics and virtues such as industry and self-control seemed unconvincing. The idealization of the lifestyle of ascetics opened the door for interpreting athletic training as a sign of vanity. Whereas before intellectual discourse had expressed a suspicion of vice regarding the gluttonous professional athletes, now this suspicion could even be directed at the average visitor to the gymnasium. Even if only a part of the population thought in this way, the clear advantage of physical training and of an artificially muscular body in the field of elite self-representation – the advantage of sending your son to the ephebate – disappeared. As a result, the public support for the institutions that upheld athletic training as part of the elite lifestyle crumbled away.

The naked body

Surprisingly perhaps, at least to modern eyes, nudity has thus far not come up as a problem created by the new sensitivities of the third century onward. Tertullian did not even mention that athletes were naked. Novatian did, but only as a description, not as an argument. Lactantius put the nudity of the athletes on the same level as the fact that they were covered with oil and wore crowns.[96] For Clement of Alexandria too, it was self-evident that wrestling was practiced naked.[97] Several centuries before, nudity had been one of the reasons why Romans had originally objected to *agones*. Just like Greeks, Romans bathed in public bath-houses, but the nudity of the baths was less ostentatious than that of the *agones*, as the bathers did not perform, drawing all eyes to their bodies. The public nudity of athletics was in the early Republic seen as emblematic of moral corruption. Until the first century BC, therefore, athletes competing in Rome wore loincloths.[98] In the imperial period, however, these criticisms ceased in the West. In the East, the public nudity of athletes went back to the archaic period and was never contested. Nor did Christians object to the nude bodies of athletes, as they perceived public nudity in the same way as the rest of the community, as a normal part of life. People undressed in the presence of their servants, washed in public bath-houses, and could see

[96] Novatian, *De spectaculis* (CC SL 4) 8: *Ecce tibi alter nudus salit, alter orbem aeneum contentis in aerem viribus iactat. Haec gloria est dementiae*; Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 1.21.45: *nudi, uncti, coronati . . . currunt*.

[97] *Paedagogus* 3.10.

[98] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae* 7.72.2.

statues or mosaics of naked men and women (usually mythological figures) throughout the city.

Even when the late-antique morality emerged, nudity was not immediately problematized; it remained a normal part of the daily life of the cities.[99] Ascetics lived with only a few, or sometimes completely without, clothes.[100] The nudity in the baths did not become an issue because of the separation of the sexes. Mixed bathing was traditionally forbidden by Roman law and was discouraged by the availability of separate wings, or separate opening hours for the sexes. Nevertheless some mingling, especially of male bathers with women of easy virtue, had been common, until the feelings of sexual shame stimulated by the late-antique mood created wider public support for separate bathing.[101] This separation continued to make public bathing acceptable. It was considered indecent only if naked women could be seen by men or if women could see naked men. Athletic nudity was seen in the same light: it was not problematic, because it was typically practiced among men; women were not even allowed to watch certain *agones*.

Gradually, stricter sexual morals did lead to a higher sensitivity toward nudity. Nude figures became rarer in art from the fifth century on. Sidonius remarked in the 460s that although many baths still had images of naked athletes, his did not show any such disgraceful scenes.[102] Ancient statues still decorated early Byzantine baths, but at some point, many herms and male nudes were emasculated.[103] As a result, practicing athletics without clothes became a form of indecent behavior (ἀφροσύνη): in the later sixth century Menander compared taking off his clothes to exercise to taking off his decency.[104] This passage provides rare evidence that enthusiasts who practiced athletics still existed even in the later sixth century, long after the last *agones*. Unlike his ancestors, however, Menander was ashamed about this episode later in life. The behavior of the Byzantine athletics-aficionados was subversive and not used as part of their self-representation. It would never have been known to us, if Menander's later expression of shame had not been *bon ton*.

In the decline of athletics this increased association between nudity and indecency can have been only a very minor factor. It became problematic

[99] Brown 1988: 315. [100] Markschies 2004: 194.

[101] Yegül 1992: 32–33. For Christian support see e.g. John Chrysostom, *De inani gloria et de educandis liberis* (SC 188) 60. In St.Pont. III 27, the sponsor of baths in Phazimonites (Pontus) explains in a building inscription from the second half of the fourth century that he provided separate wings for men and women for reasons of chastity (σαοφροσύνης ἕνεκα).

[102] Sidonius, *Ep.* 2.2.6. [103] Auinger and Rathmayr 2007: 247–48. [104] Suidas, s.v. Μένανδρος.

only in the fifth century, when athletics had already lost most of its appeal. The problem moreover could easily be done away with by the reintroduction of loincloths. The addition of a loincloth in a fifth- or sixth-century restoration to an athletic mosaic in Aquileia indicates that this may indeed have happened at some of those places where athletics was still practiced.[105] Sidonius claims even that there was some social control over the decency of exercises in fifth-century baths. Malalas suggests the same for the early sixth-century Olympics in Antioch.[106]

The vanity of ambition

Despite the crumbling support for the public institutions for athletics in the fourth century, upper-class boys were still sent to private trainers and career athletes continued to be proud of their victories, since an agonistic drive remained much respected. In 388 Libanius could still publicly promote the ambition to outdo others; he even blamed the councilors of Antioch for lagging in this respect.[107] The essential agonistic principle fits into the ancient culture of competitive display: people made sure that they stood out in society, were noticed between their peers among the elite, and had their excellence acknowledged by their fellow citizens. Winning an athletic victory and being honored for this by the city council or higher authorities with privileges was one route; sponsoring public buildings or games, building a conspicuously luxurious villa, or wearing obviously expensive outfits were others. As will be discussed in Chapter 12, the political culture changed in late antiquity – the commemoration by the city council of outstanding deeds on stone monuments made way for the display of private riches and a more intense valuation of public acclamations – but the display culture remained very much alive in the fourth and fifth centuries and so did its competitive character. Wealthy men who felt the desire to be publicly praised (*philotimia*) and who took pride in spending more than others for the benefit of the city continued to be perceived as virtuous by an influential part of the population, as was made explicit in rhetorical speeches or was visually celebrated in art.[108]

Stricter Christians did not share this view, however. Christianity had from the beginning claimed to promote equality and to reject the quest for

[105] Bohne 2011: K1a.
[106] Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep.* 2.2.6; Malalas 12.10 (ed. Thurn 2000) (cf. p. 102).
[107] *Or.* 48.42.
[108] E.g. Libanius, *Or.* 11.133–138 and the Megalopsychia hunt mosaic from Daphne. Cf. Leyerle 2001: 49.

worldly glory.[109] In the fourth century, when for the first time Christians filled a plethora of high offices inside and outside the Church, the vices of pride and empty ambition and the virtue of humility became more central to moral discourse. In the later fourth century Evagrius of Pontus developed a list of evil thoughts. This list, which set the foundation for what are today known as the seven deadly sins, explains why ascetic monks had to choose a life outside of society: within the city, ascetics would run the risk of showing off to spectators how good they were in avoiding the lower-ranking sins of lust or greed and thus giving in to the greatest temptations of all: pride and vainglory.[110] The importance of humility and the danger of vainglory is a central problem in Christian ideology and one that was widely known. Even in a mid fourth-century documentary letter on papyrus we find the educated Christian Dorotheus explaining this as his reason for writing the anchorite Papnouthios, who had the "most glorious and most revered way of life, since you renounced the boasting of the world and abhorred the arrogance of the vainglorious."[111] The importance of humility is similarly stressed by many monastic writers, who naturally applied it to the monastic context.[112]

Living as a hermit or in a monastery was an ideal way to avoid wanting to impress the people, but even in the middle of society one had to avoid vainglory and aim at humility. Humility therefore became essential for the self-representation of figures of power within the Church. A good bishop was someone who refused the office and had to be urged to accept it.[113] Christian ideology of course was not opposed to being the best, but it did object to the wish to be acknowledged as such by others. In 469 this idealized lack of ambition was even included in the law: "For surely he is unworthy of the priesthood unless he is ordained against his consent."[114] Charity, the Christian alternative to euergetism, was based not on solidarity with fellow citizens, who might publicly acknowledge the benefaction, but on solidarity with people in need, who were less interesting allies from a traditional political perspective. But in the course of the fourth century, also bishops with experience as charitable benefactors of the poor started to become politically relevant as controllers of the crowd.[115]

For men with ambitions outside the church, however, it took a long time for this Christian alternative to supersede *philotimia*, as numerous

[109] E.g. Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 38.3. Cf. Winter 1998: 21–22.
[110] Evagrius Ponticus, *Practicus* 15–33 (SC 171), esp. 30–32. [111] P.Lond. VI 1927, ll. 30–34.
[112] Caner 2009: 595–98 lists a series of passages by, among other, Basil, John Cassian, and Nilus of Ancyra. Cf. also *Regula Benedicti* 7.
[113] Maxwell 2011: 450–51. [114] *Cod. Iust.* 1.3.30. [115] Brown 1992: 71–117.

fervent clerical criticisms of the display culture illustrate. Several fourth-century clerics advised rich laymen not to spend their money on sponsoring games to attain a vain and temporary glory (*kenodoxia* or *vanagloria*), but to give it instead to the poor and thus attain real glory in the eyes of God.[116] For John Chrysostom the drive for prestige and power was the original sin.[117] When in Gaza Italicus sought the help of the monk Hilarion for his problem concerning the horse races, Hilarion's first reaction was that Italicus should give the money to charity instead. He only consented to help him, because Italicus did not want to attain glory, but was on the contrary obliged to perform this liturgy.[118] For a long time *philotimia* remained a more efficient political instrument than humility. By the time of Justinian, however, humility had received its place in imperial self-representation.[119]

The promotion of humility by the Christian authorities may have affected the agonistic drive. As for careers within the Church, the ability to be the best was not problematized – the idea of victory indeed retained its radiance – but the ambition to be the best in physical contests was eventually scorned.[120] Augustine, for example, presents as a sin his juvenile love for winning contests.[121] The discrepancy between clerical discourse on vainglory and elite practices in the fourth and fifth centuries, however, suggests that humility's rise to prominence in the value-set of the lay elite was slow. The few athletes who chose to compete in the *agones* in the later fourth or fifth centuries obviously did not really care about being considered vain by some members of the Church. As we have seen, however, the group of career athletes shrank, so we must ask whether there were other fit and talented members of the lay elite who did indeed have scruples about publicly exhibiting their ambition to excel. The continuing popularity of public generosity suggests that even in the fifth century the negative associations of this ambition were not obvious and dominant enough for the elite to avoid publicizing it in their self-representation. It should be admitted too, however, that the aspiration to win athletic or artistic contests was far more blatantly in contradiction with the ideal of humility

[116] John Chrysostom, *De inani gloria et de educandis liberis* (SC 188) 4–6, Basil, *Homilia in illud: Destruam horrea mea* 3 (ed. Courtonne 1935).
[117] Leyerle 2001: esp. 5. [118] Jerome, *Vita sancti Hilarionis* (SC 508) 11. [119] Leppin 2009.
[120] For the positive view of sports victories think for example of the popular admiration for charioteers, the greatest of which received statues and had enough clout to start riots, see Cameron 1973. Ambition does not have to be problematized in their case, as becoming a charioteer employed by a racing stable was never an option for a young man of the elite.
[121] *Confessiones* 1.10: *amans in certaminibus superbas victorias*.

than euergetism.[122] The line between euergetism and charity was often thin: although the intention of the benefactor may have been individual fame, many people benefitted from it. Even when not strictly targeted at the needy, the donation of a church would not have attracted any clerical criticism. No one, however, benefitted from the career athlete's ambition to stand out. Therefore, the interpretation as a virtue of a competitor's drive to outdo his contestants could have become less automatic, if not problematic, already by the end of the fourth century. Without wanting to overemphasize the importance of this change in the value-set, it is entirely possible and even likely that in some elite families the decision to steer young boys toward competitive sports was re-evaluated on exactly these grounds, thus step by step diminishing the base of support for this practice. Without, however, a more detailed analysis of the importance of humility in other worldly sectors of life, which unfortunately falls outside the scope of this book, it is impossible to assess how large its impact was. It is probably safer to assume that, for the majority of people who chose not to steer their talented boys toward public competition, the decisive argument was not the possible association with pride, but danger of being associated with lower-class athlete performers. After all, circa 400, outside of the few places with *agones*, only the tiny section of society that possessed a good literary background would have understood that competitive athletics could indeed be an elite pursuit.

The afterlife of positive associations: agonistic metaphors

Whereas real-life athletes were no longer spontaneously seen in a positive light from the late fourth century on, but were increasingly associated with vanity and indecency, metaphorical athletes continued to shine. Despite the change in perceptions, the literary image of the virtuous athlete evidently still worked. Themistius could for example associate athletes with self-control in an oration addressed to Constantius: he declared that an emperor could not be at the mercy of pleasures, and had to be disciplined in the same way as an Olympic athlete.[123] In Christian literature agonistic metaphors are particularly common. To understand the seeming contradiction between the positive metaphors and the negative standpoint which the same authors expressed on *agones*, one has to detach the

[122] Winter 1998: 21–22. Kaldellis 2007: 120 observes the urgency of the tension between Christianity as a religion of humility and the agonistic and aristocratic character of Greek culture.
[123] *Or.* 1.5b.

metaphor from its real-life connotations and look at how it developed as a rhetorical tool in a literary tradition that pagans and Christians shared.

Athletic metaphors can be found throughout Greek literature, particularly in stylized genres, and are common in late-antique orations and literary letters. Contests served as a flexible literary tool for describing any situation. If someone spoke well, he was an athlete with words,[124] if he was near a desired result, he was like an athlete about to win a crown,[125] if he had a strong desire, he longed like an athlete for a crown,[126] if news was announced, it was proclaimed as by a herald at the games.[127] Some metaphors focused on specific details of the *agones*, such as the difference between the short race of the *stadion* and the long race of the *dolichos*, or referred to famous athletes, such as Milon or Melankomas.[128] At times the comparison was far-fetched. Libanius wrote, for example, that the strange course of his juridical battle with another professor was just as absurd as when an athlete who had the chance to kill his opponent would refuse to clinch him and instead let him go, but then tried to harm his mother with magic.[129]

These traditional athletic images remained popular because they fitted the literary taste of late antiquity well: with an archaic vocabulary and grammar, and a set of historical references, people could identify themselves as members of the upper class; the classicizing or atticizing style distanced them from the masses and aligned them with the elites of other cities. It was indeed in such expressions of *paideia* that Greekness survived as an element of Byzantine identity.[130] Talking about athletics in a fashionable and literary way meant talking about the concept of 'athletics', not about yesterday's contest. For an atticizing effect, contemporary technical jargon was avoided. For example, to denote the contest president one could use not only the traditional but still common term *agonothetes*, but also the even more traditional and long since obsolete term *athlothetes*. On the other hand, the normal title for presidents of Olympic games in the imperial age, *alytarches*, was avoided, because it was not attested in classical

[124] E.g. Libanius, *Ep.* 548; Aeneas Gazaeus, *Ep.* 11 (ed. Massa Positano 1950).
[125] E.g. Libanius, *Or.* 18.283; *Ep.* 58.
[126] E.g. Libanius, *Ep.* 573.
[127] E.g. Julian, *Or.* 3.23 (no. Budé); Libanius, *Ep.* 442; 1463.
[128] E.g. Themistius, *Or.* 15.296a (*stadion* versus *dolichos*); *Or.* 10.139a–b (Melankomas as an example of how to win without fighting); *Or.* 1.7b (Poulydamas and Glaukos); Himerius, *Or.* 13 (Glaukos as example of someone using the opportune moment); Ammianus Marcellinus 30.7.2–3 (Milon).
[129] *Or.* 1.63. Cf. Themistius, *Or.* 16, a comparable portrait of an athlete who is winning, but hesitates to finish the match.
[130] E.g. Millar 1969: 13–14; Bowie 1970: 3–4; Swain 1996: 17–100. For late antiquity see Brown 1992: 35–47; Kaldellis 2007: 120–72.

literature. Authors in search of good classical terms could turn for inspiration to lexica based on fifth- and fourth-century BC authors, particularly Pollux' *Onomasticon*.[131] Proper names of games other than those of the *periodos* were avoided as well, as most of these were unattested in classical literature. Because most metaphors deal either with undated Olympics or with an unnamed, abstract contest, athletics was not really a historical theme like Marathon or Salamis. It functioned, however, in the same way as a *lieu de mémoire*. It remained a strong literary image into late antiquity. In 369 Themistius concluded a speech celebrating the consulate of prince Valentinian with the notion of taking pride in one's fatherland. "Like those who win the Olympic games" were his final words. The prominent position of this image in the text shows Themistius' faith that these words would have a powerful impact on his public.

A refined style and an ability to engage with the past were acquired through a high-level education (*paideia*). Handbooks show that use of agonistic images was part of this rhetorical schooling. The late third- or early fourth-century handbook of Menander shows how to use an athletic metaphor in a bedroom speech (i.e. a pep talk before the wedding night): "If we were athletes and had to compete at Olympia or Pytho against other athletes, there would necessarily have been a prize offered, a herald present, a judge of the victory, and a public race-course. But since the performance is the rite of marriage, Eros the umpire, Hymen the herald, and the bedroom the race-course, beware of behaving like a coward in battle and fearing the rout before engagement: imagine rather that Desire stands by you on one side, and Marriage on the other, while Love judges the contest and Hymen cries out: Go, fight in a manner worthy of your fathers."[132] According to the contemporary handbook of pseudo-Dionysius a speaker should in an exhortation speech before the games stress the importance of his own contribution by describing it as a more difficult battle than the physical contests. By stressing the importance of words, the speaker should make the athletes respect them.[133] Rhetorical exercises for students dealt with hypothetical problems reminiscent of the subject matter of classical authors, particularly Demosthenes. Sopater, a student of Himerius from the later fourth century, wrote a rhetorical exercise in defense of a man who was registered for the Olympics, but upon learning that his hometown was

[131] For athletics, the relevant section is *Onomasticon* 3.144–155.
[132] Menander Rhetor 406–407 (Περὶ κατευναστικοῦ). Translation from ed. Russell and Wilson 1981: 149.
[133] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ars Rhetorica* 7.284–286 (in Teubner edition of Dionysius of Halicarnassus).

at war, left Olympia to become a war hero. When he wanted to register again for the next games, he was refused with reference to a rule that a person who had left after registering could never compete again.[134] Because of this traditional repertoire it is sometimes difficult to identify the religion of a late-antique author on the basis of style and subject matter.[135] The Christian Ausonius, for example, wrote four short poems on the four classical leading games, about the crowns, the locations, the gods, and the legendary heroes connected to these games. The challenge of the exercise was to fit the information on each of the games into the metrical framework of the verses.[136] One of these poems was a translation of a Greek epigram, preserved in the Palatine Anthology, but also discovered among the papers of Dioskoros, a sixth-century notary and poet from the village of Aphrodito in Middle-Egypt.[137] The theme was not so widely popular on account of its historical relevance, but for its literary value. As a result of the attention for agonistic imaginary in rhetorical education, the idea of an athletic contest remained available for rhetoricians even when contests had disappeared. In the sixth century Christian rhetoricians such as Choricius indeed still refer to athletics in their historical exercises.[138] That athletics is mostly used to express a positive image illustrates the conservatism of the genre, but in no way reflects contemporary attitudes toward practicing athletics.

While in high literature agonistic metaphors were used to describe any situation, in moralizing texts the meaning is more strictly defined: the athlete is a stereotypical model for the abstract idea of a noble, that is morally irreproachable, man. The representation as a contest of a life lived according to high moral standards developed out of the traditional literary metaphors, and was used by authors from different backgrounds. As early as the fifth century BC, the word for physical training (ἄσκησις) was applied to moral training. In the first century AD, athletic metaphors were used for example by Epictetus (a Greek in Rome), Seneca (a Roman in Rome), Philo (a Jew in Alexandria), and Paul (a Christian with Jewish background writing to Corinth).[139] Though also used by pagan

[134] Διαίρεσις ζητημάτων 349–356 (ed. Walz 1835). For Sopater see Innes and Winterbottom 1988: 1–2.
[135] See Cameron 2007: 28–44.
[136] Ausonius, *Eclogae* 19–20.
[137] *Anthologia Palatina* 9.357. For Dioskoros see Mac Coull 1989: esp. 126–27 and P.Ciar.Masp. II 67188.6–10. Cf. Ausonius, *Ecloga* 19.
[138] Choricius 3.2.1; 4.1.35; 6.1.11 (compare Pausanias 5.6.7); 8.1.15; 17.74; etc.
[139] E.g. Epictetus, *Dissertationes ab Arriano digestae* 3.10.7, *Enchiridion* 29.3; Seneca, *Epistulae morales* 13.1–2; *De tranquillitate animi* 3.1. Cf. Mähl 1974: 56–64. For references and discussion of the metaphor in the work of Philo see Lugaresi 2008: 463–73. The best-known example of Paul is 1 Corinthians 9.24–27. Other examples and discussion in Pfitzner 1967: 82–186 and Esler 2005. Pfitzner 1967: 23–72 on the Stoic and Jewish examples by which Paul may have been influenced.

authors,[140] it is in late antiquity particularly frequent in moralizing Christian texts.

From its early beginning in the writings of Paul, the Christian agonistic metaphor performs a specific role, namely to explain how one reaches heaven.[141] Despite being typically oriented towards an eschatological goal, the metaphor remained flexible as different elements of an *agon* could underline different aspects of a moral struggle.[142] If the Christian lifestyle was the arena of a spiritual contest (στάδιον πνευματικόν), the good Christian was a competitor (ἀγωνιστής) or athlete (ἀθλητής). Performing well in the contest that is life required constant training (ἀσκέω, γυμνάζω), supported by other Christians and clerics, presented as fellow competitors (συναγωνισταί) and trainers (γυμνασταί, παιδοτρίβαι). Monasteries could also be called wrestling-schools (παλαίστρα). Images such as the undressing of the athlete (ἐκδύομαι), the anointing (ἀλείφω), and the covering with dust (κόνις) of the anointed skin could be used to picture the preparation for the symbolic contest. Fighting evil was a difficult task, requiring toils (πόνος, κάματος) and sweat (ἱδρώς). One could not cheat; everyone had to compete according to the rules (νομίμως ἀθλεῖν) under the all-seeing eyes of God, the contest president (ἀγωνοθέτης, ἀθλοθέτης). But the reward, the spiritual crown (στέφανος) or prize (βραβεῖον), that is a place in heaven, was worth it.

Most of these Christian agonistic metaphors are rather banal and vague. They are not limited to the most literary authors: a papyrus letter addressed to an Egyptian anchorite – admittedly with more literary ambition than other letters from the same archive – also describes the ascetic lifestyle of the addressee as his "most noble contest."[143] Only authors with a good knowledge of real-life athletics, however, could play with the theme and occasionally refer to very specific elements of the games. John Chrysostom occasionally depicts such detailed scenes, for example when he talks about the moment at which the competitors after thirty days of preparation go to

[140] E.g. Porphyrius, *De abstinentia* 1.31. [141] Poplutz 2004: 399.

[142] The following general remarks stem from a systematic survey of athletic metaphors in the works of John Chrysostom, Isidorus of Pelusium, and Theodoret, combined with other Christian athletic metaphors I encountered in the course of my research. Merkelbach 1975: 108–32 gives a more complete overview of terms often associated with athletics, on the basis of early Christian writings in Greek (esp. Clement, Origen, and Eusebius). There is a shorter discussion with Latin examples in Weismann 1972: 111–21. Hugoniot 1998: 687–91 studies athletic metaphors in the works of Augustine. Jiménez Sánchez 2000 discusses the vocabulary of all types of spectacles in the work of Latin authors. Koch 2007a: 45–158 collects the agonistic metaphors in the work of John Chrysostom. Albanidis, Kasabalis, and Kassaris 2011: 4–8 list various athletic images from the work of Basil. Lugaresi 2008 occasionally mentions agonistic metaphors from Philo, Origen, and John Chrysostom (463–73, 518–22, 712–22).

[143] P.Lond. VI 1927.

the stadium, where the contest president asks if anyone has reason to accuse the competitors of being slaves. He then compares this exclusive character of the games to the inclusive character of Christianity.[144]

In the Christian appropriation of the image of the noble athlete lies a remarkable contradiction. In the traditional perception, it made sense to interpret the physical effort of the athlete as emblematic of a metaphysical effort, because the physical excellence of the athlete was thought to be dependent on his moral excellence. For Christian authors, however, certainly in late antiquity, the metaphorical athlete served as a moral exemplum, but real-life athletes could not.[145] This contradiction was not new: because of their personal priorities or their Roman background, earlier authors had also stressed the difference between the base physical struggle and the more valuable spiritual contest.[146] The obvious popularity of the image in late-antique Christian literature is more striking, however, as authors at the same time deprecated the actual games. A strong connection with daily life is not always necessary for an image to be strong, however. This is confirmed by the fact that the pagan authors best known for their use of this image are the first-century Stoics, who wrote in Rome before games were customary there and hence cannot have had – or assumed their audience to have – an in-depth knowledge of athletics. The literary style of the authors furthermore automatically created a distance between the metaphorical athletes and their real-life counterparts.[147]

A first factor in explaining the surprising popularity of these metaphors among Christians is their early appropriation. The influence of Paul has often been noted in this respect.[148] As discussed in the previous section, early Christians in the East did not share the negative perception of athletes of their Western and later colleagues. By the time the contradiction became apparent examples from the Scriptures, not only from Paul but also from 4 Maccabees,[149] had already made the image acceptable, or even a stock

[144] *Hom. 1 in principium Actorum* (PG 51) 76. Cf. *Ad illuminandos catecheses* (PG 49) 236.

[145] To a certain extent, this was already true for Roman literature. Roman authors grew to accept the Greek interpretation of the value of athletics, but never shared it.

[146] E.g. Seneca, *De ira* 14.2. He claims that self-control is easy, since even athletes, who use only the basest part of themselves, can achieve it.

[147] On top of the obvious discrepancy between technical terms and literary language, the athletic vocabulary used in the circus underwent innovations (e.g. γυμνικοί for athletes in P.Oxy. LXXIX 5215 and 5218, or λουκτάτωρ for a wrestler in Vita Theodori Syceotae 88) while the words of the metaphors remain very traditional.

[148] E.g. Weismann 1972: 112; Hugoniot 1998: 687, 690–91; Jiménez Sánchez 2000: 142–69.

[149] 4 Maccabees 6.10 (late 1st c. BC or early 1st c. AD) coined the expression γενναῖος ἀθλητής, i.e. 'noble athlete', which occurs regularly in Christian literature, but is rare in pagan literature before the fourth century, when authors like Himerius, Libanius, and Julian pick it up. Closest epigraphic

phrase. Later authors quoted Paul's metaphors, and pseudo-Pauls even considered the athletic language characteristic of Paul's style.[150] From this early beginning, moreover, the metaphor acquired – unlike in the pagan tradition – a specific role: although Paul's metaphors seem varied, they all have the same function, namely to explain how the good Christian could reach heaven, or metaphorically, the victory crown.

Secondly, the image was acceptable because it was stylish. Most Christian authors had enjoyed the same classical rhetorical education as their pagan colleagues and hence had developed a similar taste, with a preference for archaisms and atticism. When appropriating the image of the athlete, they adapted a widely appreciated literary theme to their own purposes. They too avoided modern technical terms. Common technical terms such as *periodonikes, pleistonikes*, or *pythionikes* are not attested in metaphors. Instead Christian authors sometimes used *stephanites*. As a word for victor this was actually a fourth-century neologism, but it was more acceptable because previously it had been used as adjective for the most prestigious contests, and therefore it was, unlike some older terms for victor, reminiscent of fourth-century BC literature.[151] Proper names of games are avoided as well, increasingly even the Olympics, which traditionally figured prominently in metaphors.[152] In the fifth century metaphors became shorter and ever more banal. As long as *agones* existed, at least some authors found inspiration for more elaborate metaphors in the actual contests. In the fifth century, however, there were no longer real-life contests with respected athletes to inspire them.

A third factor in the popularity of the image is its power to visualize an abstract idea. For Christian authors this image of the noble athlete and *agon* was more than literary play: it was a model for understanding and visualizing a spiritual battle. The physical contest of the athlete made the opaque metaphysical struggle imaginable. The same goes for another image in tension with Christian ideology, and often combined with that

parallel is IAph2007 5.214, an inscription for Aurelius Achilles, who was 'most noble in his athletic career' (ll. 17–18: ἀθλήσεως δὲ τὸν γενναιότατον).

[150] E.g. John Chrysostom, *In sanctum Julianum martyrem* (PG 50) 667; Augustine, *Enarrationes in psalmum 39* 11; Basil, *Homilia in illud: Attende tibi ipsi* (ed. Rudberg 1962) 30. Cf. Esler 2005: 382.

[151] Remijsen 2011: 101. See Chapter 11.

[152] Theodoret, who regularly uses athletic metaphors, refers to the Olympic games in only two of them: *Historia religiosa* (SC 234) 3 and 12.7. In *Ep. Sirm.* (SC 98) 72 he contrasts the Christian holidays, which are celebrated everywhere in the same way, with pagan festivals, which are different in every city. He lists the Olympics of Elis, the *Pythia* of Delphi, the *Hyakinthia* of Sparta, and the *Panathenaia, Thesmophoria*, and *Dionysia* of Athens, all festivals which existed in the classical period, which again demonstrates the importance of archaisms in the use of athletic vocabulary.

of the athlete, namely that of the good Christian as a soldier. This image became popular despite the ideological Christian opposition to violence and killing.[153] That the struggling athlete was embedded in the mental framework of Christians as an image is illustrated for example by the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, allegedly recorded in part by Perpetua herself. In one of the visions she had while locked up in prison, she saw herself becoming a naked man, being rubbed with oil by her companions, and then fighting in a *pankration* match with an ugly Egyptian who represented the devil.[154] The image is also common outside literature. Agonistic symbols, especially the victory crown and palm, were incorporated into Christian visual art.[155]

Christian authors were aware of the contradiction between image and reality and sometimes addressed this problem in their sermons, explaining to their flock that the physical and metaphysical contest were not the same, as the former was base and useless and only the latter was commendable. When using agonistic metaphors, John Chrysostom often points out differences between the physical and spiritual matches, such as the function of the contest president, the gender and descent of the competitors, the value of the prizes, etc. For example, he finds the rewards for athletes, that is laurel or olive crowns, food in the *prytaneion*, and statues – rewards typical of the imperial age are again avoided – cold and worthless in comparison to eternal life.[156] Severus of Antioch plays with the theme on a more structural level in his homily on Athanasius. Towards the end of this homily, he concludes that Athanasius was a great athlete, who practiced the contests of devotion and won myriads of victories. Smoothly making the transition from his theological theme to the problem of the day, he then asked his public the rhetorical question whether these were the kind of things one could see at the Olympics, which were taking place that very month. The bishop explained that it was not: physical contests were unreasonable and stimulated immoral passions among the spectators.

[153] Weismann 1972: 111–12; DeVoe 1987: 96; Hugoniot 1998: 688. The initial exclusion of soldiers from the Christian community was mitigated early on, so for late antiquity this metaphor is not necessarily contradictory.

[154] See Robert 1982: 253–61, who compares the vocabulary of Greek and Latin versions of this passage.

[155] Jiménez Sánchez 2000: 173–78. Photographs of several Christian funerary monuments depicting monumental prize-crowns in Duval 1984: figs. 15–17.

[156] *Hom. 1 in Matthaeum* (PG 57) 20: Τὰ δὲ ἔπαθλα τῆς πολιτείας, οὐ φύλλα δάφνης, οὐδὲ κότινος, οὐδὲ ἡ ἐν πρυτανείῳ σίτησις, οὐδὲ εἰκόνες χαλκαῖ, τὰ ψυχρὰ ταῦτα καὶ εὐτελῆ· ἀλλὰ ζωὴ τέλος οὐκ ἔχουσα, καὶ τὸ Θεοῦ γενέσθαι παῖδας, καὶ τὸ μετ' ἀγγέλων χορεύειν, καὶ τῷ θρόνῳ παρεστάναι τῷ βασιλικῷ, καὶ διηνεκῶς εἶναι μετὰ Χριστοῦ. All metaphors are collected in Koch 2007a.

Christians should not watch the games, but should follow the example of Athanasius instead.[157]

Severus was in a unique position, living in the only city that still had games in the sixth century. There were athletes outside Antioch, but these performed in a different setting, that of the circus, and were therefore not so easily associated with the image of a noble contest. Elsewhere in the Empire, the connection between image and reality had already disappeared by the early fifth century. The ascetic athlete lived on, however, as an abstract ideal, unrelated to actual individuals who might not live up to it. Because of the literary tradition, people could still imagine what a noble athlete was like, without being able to nuance the picture. The noble athlete can perhaps be compared to the modern image of Prince Charming: even though no one ever now meets a handsome prince riding on a white horse, this still works as a model for imagining the perfect gentleman, because of its central place among the stories and symbols we have all grown up with.

[157] *Hom.* 91 (PO 25), 25–27.

CHAPTER 12

The practical organization of agones

The city and the *agones*

The cities were the driving force behind the organization of the *agones*. Already in the archaic period the organization of *agones* lay not in the hands of the sanctuary where the contest took place, but in those of a nearby *polis*; for as soon as games started to have a larger catchment area, the expenses became considerable and a sanctuary did not always have the money and, particularly, the required manpower at its disposal. A *polis* could appoint citizens for different tasks: ambassadors to invite athletes and other representatives of Greek cities, judges to watch over the competitions, maintenance personnel for the upkeep of the buildings, policemen for keeping public order, etc. A *polis*, moreover, had established institutions to make formal decisions on every step. Although every contest belonged to a particular city (or a league of cities, e.g. the amphictyony), there was also an international aspect, because through contests, cities engaged with other cities: citizens from across the Greek world met in the panhellenic sanctuaries, showed the strength of their home towns by their agonistic successes and monuments, invited people to their own games, and acted as representatives elsewhere.

The initiative for a new contest normally belonged to the city as well. This can be seen clearly in the early Hellenistic period, when there was a sudden rise of new foundations, the procedure for which is preserved in the format of civic decrees.[1] The people and council would decide to establish a contest after the model of one of the four top *agones* and would then send embassies to other cities and *koina* to have the games formally accepted as such and to invite representatives to visit them. These other cities then decided how to react to the proposal. The rush of new games in the

[1] More on this procedure in Remijsen 2011: 103–07. A version of this chapter is published as Remijsen 2015b.

Hellenistic period may be linked to the cities' need to assert themselves as autonomous, despite their attachment to Hellenistic kingdoms. By means of an *agon*, moreover, a city could present itself as a bulwark of Greekness, particularly in areas where Greek culture was not indigenous. By inviting representatives from other cities, the city could send this message to the rest of the Greek world.

The need for self-assertion became even stronger under the Roman Empire, when cities were subordinated to Roman governors and emperors, but still continued to govern themselves through a city council dominated by the local elite. The exponential increase in new foundations under the Principate, particularly from the second century on, is connected to a lively inter-city competition for prestige and imperial attention. Aelius Aristides described the *pax Romana* of the second century as follows: "The whole inhabited world has laid down its old dress and weapons, as if celebrating a feast, and has freely turned to decorating and all kinds of pleasures. All other kinds of competition have left the cities, but this single rivalry holds all of them: how each city will appear as beautiful and charming as possible. Everything is full of gymnasia, fountains, monumental gates, temples, cranes, and schools."[2] All over the Empire cities wanted to outdo their neighbors. They competed for titles such as 'metropolis', 'first city', or '*neokoros*'. One way to get into the picture was through the construction of impressive public buildings, as described by Aristides. An alternative was to boast of agonistic successes.

The two clearest indicators of the agonistic success of a city in the Roman Empire were the number of its *agones* and the categories to which these belonged. Cities always wanted more games, and preferably sacred and eiselastic contests. They wanted to impress with the splendor of the feast and the level of competition. Therefore, organizers tried to attract international champions, and when these won, they rewarded them with statues, inscriptions, honorary citizenships, and sometimes even honorary memberships of the council.[3] Local athletes received honorary seats in the theater and statues in the center of the city as well as rewards for their international successes. Some cities, moreover, minted coins with agonistic themes as publicity for their contests.[4]

[2] Aelius Aristides, Εἰς Ῥώμην 97.

[3] The greatest champions were citizens of several cities, e.g. Asklepiades (*periodonikes* and later high priest of the athletic association) was Ἀλεξανδρεύς Ἑρμοπολείτης Ποτιολανός Νεαπολείτης καὶ Ἠλεῖος καὶ Ἀθηναῖος βουλευτὴς καὶ ἄλλων πόλεων πολλῶν πολείτης καὶ βουλευτής (IGUR I 240, ll. 8–10).

[4] See Wiotte 1998 for a discussion of the agonistic types.

Cities benefitted from their *agones* in various ways. The contests, which were usually given by a private benefactor to the city, first of all consolidated the local community of citizens. Because non-elite citizens also had a role in the procession, could be appointed for minor liturgies, and ate meat during the banquet, *agones* confirmed the continuing importance of the citizen status of non-elite citizens in a time of increasing oligarchization, which according to Zuiderhoek was an important reason why euergetism was such a central aspect of civic life in the Principate.[5] This social role accorded to the community of citizens can also explain why *agones* were more popular benefactions than gladiator shows, which were also greatly appreciated, but did not offer such opportunities for non-elite citizens to feel included.

By means of a contest, a city could furthermore send messages to the world. Towns thus could use *agones* to assert themselves as *poleis*. For a new city, the grant of a council and the award of the status of *polis* was often soon followed by the institution of a contest. In the provincial *metropoleis* of Egypt, for example, contests did not exist in the early Empire even though gymnasium culture was long established here, but in many of these towns *agones* quickly appeared following the grant of a *boule* by Septimius Severus.[6] Details in the organization, such as the choice of a particular god or references to local history in the procession or competition, could stress local particularities that set the town apart from others. Other details, such as the modeling of games after a traditional contest of the *periodos*, broadcasted a more international Greek character. This local civic pride was not in contradiction with loyalty to the Roman emperor, which was often manifested in the name of the games or in pictures carried in the procession.[7] Because *agones* offered the cities these opportunities to assert themselves, they were attractive not merely to *poleis* in the traditional Greek world, but could also have a role in some *civitates* of the West.

In the international relations of *poleis*, moreover, ambassadors representing their city at a foreign contest played an important role. Cities with new

[5] Main thesis of Zuiderhoek 2009: esp. 86–109. [6] Frisch 1986: 12. See also Chapter 4.

[7] Boatwright 2000: 95–98 and Newby 2005: 143–228 come to similar conclusions by a different set of examples. As markers of local identity, Boatwright refers to the statues of the *demos, tribes, boule, gerousia*, and *ephebeia* carried around during the games of Ephesus; Newby cites the whipping contest in Sparta as an invented tradition referring to the strict Spartan education of the sixth and fifth centuries, and the participation of the ephebes in regattas at Athens as a reference to the great naval victories of the past. Regarding markers of Greek identity, Boatwright refers to contests for interpreters of classical comedy or tragedy, Newby to the habit of erecting statues of local victors of panhellenic games. Concerning civic loyalty to the Empire, Boatwright discusses the incorporation of the imperial cult.

sacred games were congratulated from all sides and happily received representatives, in the imperial period called συνθύται, to celebrate with them and sacrifice together (the συνθυσία). The proud organizers sometimes honored these visitors with inscriptions or celebrated the common sacrifice on monuments.[8] It has been suggested that the numerous *homonoia* coins are connected to such sacrifices.[9] Occasionally the embassies could become a field of competition as well, with cities trying to outdo their neighbors in expressing concord.[10]

How to institute and finance a new *agon*

Every new contest initially began as the idea of an individual. With the exception of a few contests conceived of by a monarch (e.g. the *Ptolemaia* or the *Kapitolia*), the initiator was usually a prominent member of the local elite, who made his proposal to the city council. The motives could be religious, as in the case of the *Leukophryena*, which were introduced after a priestess had an epiphany,[11] and/or political, for example when games were held to show loyalty to a visiting emperor or when they were instituted to outdo a neighboring city. Economic considerations could also be a powerful stimulus, as the tax-free markets with foreign visitors boosted the local economy. This explains, for example, why in Thyateira the wool merchants actively supported a new foundation.[12] In many cases, however, personal ambition was at least as important a drive. This is most obvious for games named after the initiator, such as the *Demostheneia* in Oenoanda,

[8] E.g. IAph2007 12.924–930, a series of inscriptions honoring the visitors who joined in the first sacrifice of newly founded games at Aphrodisias (3rd c.). More examples in Weiß 1998: 59–60. See also Robert 1982: 233.

[9] Weiß 1998: 60–68.

[10] This is illustrated by SEG XXVIII 1566, ll. 78–85. This inscription from Cyrene records a reproachful letter of Antoninus Pius to Ptolemais-Barca, because this city had apparently tried to escape from the influence of the *metropolis* Cyrene: "[I am surprised] that you, although in the past you have never sent a delegation or joined in the sacrifice, have now for the first time sent someone to the contest of the [– -]. For you are not ignorant that making such innovations is a source of competition between cities." Reynolds 1978: 114–15, 120–21 read τὸν τῶ̃[ν Κυρην]αίων ἀγῶνα in line 82, assuming that the citizens of Ptolemais normally 'co-organized' the provincial games of Cyrene, but now wanted their own games. This interpretation does not reflect the actual meaning of συνθύω. Oliver 1979 correctly explained that the people of Ptolemais now for the first time sent their own representatives and supplemented τὸν τῶ̃ [ν Καπετο]λίων ἀγῶνα. As the *Kapitolia* were the only quadrennial games in Rome at that time, this is the only reading that could explain why the emperor himself sent a letter.

[11] IvM 16.

[12] IGR IV 1252 = TAM V 1019: This inscription erected by wool merchants honors G. Perelius Aurelius Alexander, who had successfully led an embassy to establish a sacred and eiselastic contest. The merchants had obviously supported the idea of a new contest – if they had not proposed it themselves – hoping it would attract considerable economic activity.

the artistic contest donated by C. Iulius Demosthenes.[13] Often such games were proposed in the will of a donor, with meticulous stipulations on practical aspects such as the date and the prizes, or on who had to be appointed as officials.[14] Smaller contests organized strongly around the personality of the donor had a lesser role in the competition between cities, but a bigger one in the competition between leading families of a city. Sometimes the initiators stipulated that their heirs should preside over the games.[15] Nevertheless even these family projects were gifts to the city.

When the institution of a new contest was agreed upon in the city council, the important first step was to secure a budget. The size of this budget and the expenses it was used for obviously depended on the scale of the festival. Unfortunately, accounts with all incomes and outgoings of a contest are not available for imperial-age festivals; nor are there detailed modern studies on this topic.[16] Accounts on papyrus occasionally mention expenses for *agones*, but never offer a full picture.[17] Lists of prizes for a few contests and some accounts of minor Hellenistic *agones*, recorded on stone, give a general idea of the main expenses.[18] It is, however, the income that interests us most in the present chapter.

There is no evidence that spectators paid admission.[19] Although it cannot be excluded that this occasionally happened, there is no reason to consider this a major source of income. Nor is there evidence after the first century AD that *agones* were financed by the proceeds of temple land, even if games were still celebrated in honor of a god, who usually had a temple that owned lands.[20] The city, and not the temple, administered the games, and therefore also its budget. Most *agones* seem to have been financed by a

[13] A long inscription about their foundation is published in Wörrle 1988: 4–17. English translation in Mitchell 1990: 183–87.

[14] E.g. IAph2007 12.538; 15.330, ll. 5–12; TAM II 301.

[15] *Dig.* 50.12.10. Such stipulations can also be supposed in cases such as TAM II 301, where the *agonothetes* is obviously related to the founder. See also Farrington 2008: 244.

[16] Some observations in Herz 1997: 250. Aneziri 2014 has collected many relevant sources. For the income there is now Camia 2011.

[17] E.g. P.Oxy. III 519 (2nd c.), an account of a local festival with some expenses for athletic shows; P.Harr. I 97 V (4th c.), an account recording some expenses related to the Oxyrhynchite *Kapitolia*, as well as other, apparently unrelated, expenses. The main problem of understanding such accounts is the absence of context.

[18] Lists of prizes: e.g. IAph2007 11.305. For the financing of Hellenistic festivals see Migeotte 2010: 138–43.

[19] This is attested for Athenian theater festivals in the classical period; see Wilson 2010: 60.

[20] Camia 2011: 52–57 discusses many examples of festivals with sacred funds, but all from the Hellenistic and early Roman period. His examples of agonistic funds (57–63) also include early cases, but second- and third-century examples prevail, indicating a growing preference for this type of financing.

specific earmarked fund, which produced enough annual revenues to pay for the regular expenses. Such an agonistic fund could be derived from farmland, which was leased out, or from a sum of money, which was invested in loans.[21] The financial plan of the *Demostheneia* in Oenoanda, the best-documented foundation, represents a mix: Demosthenes or his heirs would annually give 1,000 denarii, which was to be invested by a city official, at his own risk, during the three years without games. The 3,000 denarii would in this way be augmented to 3,450 denarii, which together with the final 1,000 formed a budget of 4,450 denarii. This arrangement was hence not an actual cash fund, but a promise to annually donate money from the family income, without designating a part of it as agonistic fund. As the fate of the contest in this way depended on the fate of the family fortune, it was not considered a structural way of financing and presented as only temporary. The arrangement would change as soon as a property, capable of maintaining an income of that size, was designated by the family as agonistic estate, the management of which would similarly fall under the responsibility of a city official.[22] This scenario for the future shows that an estate was considered to be the most secure basis of a fund, which could guarantee the eternity of the contest, and was therefore the preferred manner of financing. Investing cash, on the other hand, was seen as more risky. Of course, the soundness of a financial arrangement was judged by contemporary standards: the future effect of inflation could not be predicted, but a potential decrease of the capital because people were unable to pay back their loans, or due to embezzlement, could be foreseen, and a cash fund was on this basis probably known to be more vulnerable than a fund based on land.

In a letter to the association of performing artists Hadrian distinguished between games established by an imperial ordinance, by a decree of the city council, or by testament (νόμον ἢ ψήφισμα ἢ διαθήκας).[23] These represent three types of donors of agonistic funds: the emperor could provide a fund,

[21] For funds consisting of land see Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 1, ll. 41–42 (ἐξ ὧν Νύσιος ἀπέλιπεν χωρίων); OGIS 566, ll. 28–31 (ἐπὶ ἀνδριᾶσιν καὶ θέμασιν καταλελοιπότα καὶ νομὰς ('pasture land') τοῖς πολείταις ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τῆς πανηγύρεως); SEG XLVII 1771, ll. 10–16 (several patches of land in different villages); for funds consisting of money, see IAph2007 12.538, ll. 16–19 (αἱ δὲ μετὰ τὰς δ<ώ>δεκα μυριάδας <ο>ὖσαι ἐν ἐκδανεισμῷ καὶ ὁ προσγεγ<ο>ν<ώ>ς τούτοις τόκος μέχρι ἀρχῆς [ἕ]τους [ποιεῖ] κεφαλείου δηναρίων μυριάδας τρεῖς δηνάρια χείλια ὀκτ<ω>κόσια τριάκοντα ἐννέα: 120,000 on loan and 31,839 interest); P.Oxy. IV 705, ll. 46–49 (the interest of no less than 10,000 attic drachmae). Malalas 9.20; 10.27 (ed. Thurn 2000) mentions a fund with an annual income (ἐτησία προσόδος) of 15 talents, but he does not explain whether the fund was land or money.

[22] Wörrle 1988: 4–6, ll. 14–30.

[23] Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 1, ll. 8–9 and commentary on p. 36.

the city council could decide to designate a part of the civic resources, or private benefactors could make a donation, often by testament. In the case of games founded with resources provided by the city,[24] the council could either designate a piece of land as agonistic land, or decide to set aside annually a fixed sum from the treasury, without designating where this money had to come from – in the same way as Demosthenes had not yet designated a part of his property as the fund at the time the temporary arrangement was published. The first form of financing was a better guarantee for the permanence of the *agon*, the second more flexible. If the fund was not designated, the *agones* had to compete for money with other civic expenditures such as public buildings or the grain dole. In times of crisis games would not be a priority and money could be diverted. Generally, though, *agones* did well in the competition for money, particularly in the third century, when contests seem to have attracted a considerable part of the money previously spent on public building.[25]

The income from the agonistic fund, or the promise of a yearly donation, was normally combined with sponsorship from benefactors, paying for example for the starting fees of famous athletes, a banquet for the guests, or a renovation of the sports facilities.[26] Sponsorship was turned into a more structural form of income by making it liturgical.[27] The liturgical officials, most importantly the *agonothetes*, in the first place administered the agonistic fund, but were stimulated to pay extra expenses from their own pockets.

Once the city had secured funding, the next task for the council was to plan every detail of the contest: the date, the god to whom it was dedicated, the order of the competitions and sacrifices, the budget for prizes and for shows outside competition, the procedure for appointing the president, the ceremonial outfit of the president, the budget for this ceremonial outfit, the images carried in the procession, etc. In a long inscription on the *Demostheneia*, all these decisions are meticulously recorded.[28] Establishing a good date was particularly important, for if the contest could not be

[24] IAph2007 15.330, l. 17 attests a πολειτικὸς ἀγών, a name suggesting that it was financed by the city. Cf. Roueché 1993: 7–8.

[25] Mitchell 1990: 189–91.

[26] See Pleket 1976: 2–4 for examples of how the expenses were divided between public revenues and contributions of the appointed president. Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 3 clearly shows that the banquets were paid for by the presidents. For more examples of sponsoring see Camia 2011: 64–70. For the payment of starting fees see Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 66.11.

[27] Wörrle 1988: 6–8, ll. 29–37; 10, ll. 58–65: at the moment of institution the number of officials of the *Demostheneia* was fixed.

[28] Wörrle 1988: esp. 8–12, ll. 38–87.

attached to the pre-existing local circuit, its chances on success were minimal. This decision, just like the financial plan, was therefore supervised by the *curator*, the representative of the imperial administration in the city.[29]

The inscription on the *Demostheneia* likewise records the next step: obtaining permission from the emperor. In other cases approval was asked before all the practical details were settled.[30] To ensure the success of an embassy, the most influential citizens were selected to go to court. As already mentioned in Chapter 9, several successful embassies with an agonistic purpose are recorded in inscriptions. Julius Quadratus, the ambassador who asked Hadrian to grant the *Traianeia Deiphileia* in Pergamon, was not only a local benefactor, but also a member of the Roman senate and an ex-consul, and therefore probably the most influential man in Pergamon.[31] The choice of Gaius Perelius Aurelius Alexander as leader of the embassy for the eiselastic games of Thyateira was no coincidence either: as a *periodonikes* he had reached considerable fame in the agonistic circuit. After the embassy, he even became the highest official of the international athletic association. The support of an important Thyateirian at the court, M. Cn. Licinius Rufinus, may have been crucial for the success of the embassy and for Perelius' later nomination as high priest of the athletic association.[32]

Not every embassy requested a high status for its games; some just submitted financial arrangements for local games and asked for approval, as for example did the embassy for the *Demostheneia*.[33] The imperial grant may seem *pro forma* in these cases: because the victors could not claim privileges anyway, games without sacred status did not strictly need to be acknowledged by the authorities. Still the importance of the imperial fiat for even small-scale games should not be underestimated. Hadrian said two

[29] See IAph2007 12.538 and 15.330. The second letter is by a *curator*, the first is technically a letter of a priest of the provincial cult and ex-*curator*, but he looked at the finances of this contest because in the past he had frequently been asked to do this. This suggests he was given the task when he was still *curator*.

[30] As in P.Oxy. IV 705, a petition of Aurelius Horion, a donor of ephebic games, to Septimius Severus and Caracalla.

[31] IvP 269. Cf. Abbott and Johnson 1926: no. 73 and Herrmann 1975: 157–58.

[32] IGR IV 1251 = TAM V 1018, IGR IV 1252 = TAM V 1019. Cf. Robert 1937: 119–23. Perelius erected a statue for Licinius Rufinus. The inscription on the base (TAM V 984), which identifies Perelius as an official of the synod, is later than the embassy, for the inscriptions relating to the embassy do not mention Perelius' office in the athletic association, although this office would have been too important to leave out.

[33] See also P.Oxy. IV 705, a petition for ephebic games, and P.Oxy. IX 1202, where these games are explicitly called a gift of Septimius Severus and Caracalla.

things in his letter to Oenoanda: "Demosthenes will contribute the cost from his own treasuries. Let the penalties which he has fixed against those who contravene what he has fixed concerning the gift be enforced."[34] Whereas the first sentence represented Hadrian's reason for allowing the contest, namely that it had funding, the second sentence represented Demosthenes' reason for wanting permission. Donors made specific stipulations regarding the contest and wanted imperial confirmation, so that these stipulations could be enforced by their heirs. In this way they could ensure, for example, that the city would not take the presidency of the games away from their family.[35] Demosthenes wanted to ensure in particular that the agonistic land, at the time still to be designated, would still be considered property of his family, if it was no longer used for the games, and would not come to be regarded as civic land.[36] Imperial permission also meant that governors could not deny the waiving of commercial taxes during the festival and that the city council or governor could not easily appropriate the agonistic funds in times of trouble.[37]

The attention to the financial arrangements in Hadrian's letter to Oenoanda can also be found in other imperial grants.[38] The emperor wanted to make sure that keeping up a contest would not put the city in trouble, for it was in the interest of the emperor that the finances of the cities were sane, so that taxes could be collected. The best guarantee of successful international games was substantial and specifically designated agonistic lands, so it seems likely that this was a condition for the award of sacred status, at least until the late second century AD. An example of sacred games funded on agonistic land is the *Olympia* of Ephesus, instituted in the late first or early second century and funded by an estate of the late Tiberius Claudius Nysios. Long after his death, Nysios was still called eternal president on monuments honoring victors of these games, because these too were erected with money from this fund.[39] In the third century the number of sacred games increased at such a rate that not all new institutions and upgrades can have been connected to the donation of a new estate anymore, as only extremely rich – or perhaps rich and heirless – people

[34] Wörrle 1988: 4, ll. 4–5. Translation from Mitchell 1990: 183.

[35] *Dig.* 50.12.10 deals with a case of a woman who had promised the interest of a capital of 30,000 drachmae for a contest, on the condition that her husband and children presided over it. The juridical commentator Modestinus says that, if the contest were formally allowed, her children could enforce these stipulations.

[36] Wörrle 1988: 8, ll. 34–38.

[37] For the role of the governor in ensuring exemptions see Wörrle 1988: 14–16, ll. 99–102, 108–10. Cf. Potter 1998: 280–81.

[38] E.g. IvP 269, ll. 13–14. [39] IK Ephesos 1114–1118, 1120, 4413.

could donate an estate large enough to maintain a major contest. Equally, cities could put themselves in trouble if they designated too large a part of their civic lands for games, making it unavailable for other needs, and emperors had too many other expenses in the third century to be handing out crown land so generously. The exponential growth gives the impression that sacred status was awarded more easily, presumably even in cases where the city paid the contest from the treasury without designating a specific fund.

Financing *agones* in times of crisis

Although the agonistic circuit was doing particularly well under the Principate, the finances were always a delicate operation. A city needed money for many different expenses (public building, heating the baths, maintenance of the streets, etc.) and the resources used for games, the revenues of agonistic funds as well as the money and time of the officials, were not available for these other purposes. Occasionally this caused problems. In the reign of Hadrian, for example, Miletus and Chios abolished their games at the last minute to avoid the payment of prizes.[40]

The financial balance became even more delicate in the third century, when the economy of the Roman Empire was under strain because of the political and military upheaval. This much-debated crisis of the third century does not seem to have had an immediate effect on the games, however.[41] Victory lists on stone and civic coins show that there were more games than ever in the third century, which makes the *agones* one of the best indicators of the continuity of city life during this so-called crisis. As discussed in Part I, new contests continued to be established in Asia Minor after the raids of the Goths and the major earthquake in the reign of Gallienus, and for Egypt the later third century was even the heyday of its contests. Perhaps, potential difficulties were even mitigated by the economic boost a festival created, as the crowd of visitors spent money at the fair connected to the festival.[42] The regions that suffered most from the third-century crisis, the provinces along the Danube, were of little importance for the agonistic circuit. In general, the political crisis seems to have

[40] Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 1, ll. 14–19.

[41] For an introduction to the third century see e.g. Mitchell 1993: I.227–40. De Blois 2002 summarizes the major arguments in the debate on the crisis, concluding that there was indeed a serious crisis, but only in the war-ridden areas of the Empire.

[42] About the markets connected to festivals e.g. Chandezon 2007 (for the classical and Hellenistic period) and de Ligt 1993: 35–39 (Roman period).

accelerated the agonistic explosion, rather than slowing it down, because it made the emperors who were in need of support more willing to make grants. This rapid expansion of the circuit did, however, increase the burden on the local economies. It is not a coincidence that in the third century, when the agonistic circuit was growing at an ever faster rate, construction of public buildings decreased.[43] There was a limit to the revenues that could be taken away from other civic purposes. Hence, the agonistic circuit could not continue to grow at this rate.

Cities did not feel only the costs of the games they were organizing themselves, but also those of the games organized by other cities. Already circa 130, only a few decades after the introduction of the eiselastic status, Corinth found it difficult to pay for the allowances of the Corinthian victors of eiselastic games, and had to present accounts to the emperor, so that he could determine whether there was enough money to pay the athletes two-thirds or only half of their allowances.[44] By the second half of the third century, so many games had been upgraded that even insignificant contests, such as the ephebic *agon* of Oxyrhynchus, could boast of being sacred. The pool of athletes, normally relatively well-to-do people and members of the city council, who could legally get exemptions from liturgies, had become very large, as had the group who could claim allowances. A series of applications for athletic pensions preserved in the archive of the council of Hermopolis shows that these allowances could form a considerable expense for the city.[45] Diocletian, however, decreased the problem by restricting the exemptions from liturgies to a limited group of victors.[46] In the fourth century the costs of the local games may hence again have been the main concern of cities.

The epigraphic and numismatic evidence covers only the period up to circa 275, when one of the major problems, namely inflation, had only started to kick in. In order to see whether economic crisis was a factor in the decline of the games, we need to focus on the period after this date and study how each of the means of financing games (agonistic lands, cash funds, the city treasury, and sponsorship) may have suffered from various economic and financial changes in late antiquity.

As has already been said, there is no evidence for a link between temple land and the games after the first century AD, so the confiscation of the temple land by Gratian cannot be taken as a factor in the end of the

[43] Mitchell 1990: 189–91. See also the graph in Zuiderhoek 2009: 170.
[44] Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 1, ll. 31–33.
[45] SPP V 52–56, 69–81, 113 (AD 267–268).
[46] *Cod. Iust*. 10.54.1.

agones.[47] This is confirmed by the fact that the most ancient games such as the Olympics, where a traditional link with temple land cannot be entirely excluded, are known to have continued after the reign of Gratian. The confiscation of temple treasures for the imperial treasury, which had already started under Constantine, may have taken away a little of the splendor of some traditional games, but it would not have impeded the contests.[48]

For the athletic contests, agonistic land remained the most secure type of funding, as it was unaffected by inflation. The only real danger was an unexpected local crisis such as a drought or an earthquake. During a drought the agonistic land would produce too little to allow for a celebration with all the customary pomp. This could be solved with a larger contribution from sponsors, although these might also for a while have less means at their disposal. In any case, any difficulty created by climatic problems would only be temporary. Destruction by an earthquake could bring the cities to divert revenues from agonistic land to the rebuilding of essential structures. Hadrian decreed that the use of funds earmarked for the games for another purpose was forbidden unless the city had received imperial permission. Though petitions by the cities would not be considered for luxury projects, in case of necessity, for example for urgent rebuilding, the court would react positively.[49] A constitution of Diocletian and Maximian attests such an imperial permission, apparently requested *post factum*, to use the revenues of an agonistic fund for the rebuilding of city walls.[50] City walls were not a luxury, certainly not in late antiquity, so the money already diverted by the governor was judged to have been used "in a beneficial way." The need for imperial control suggests that illegal attempts to use agonistic funds for less essential building projects were a recurring problem. As long as only the revenues of the agonistic fund were used, however, and the estate itself not sold, the consequences were only short-term and did not endanger the longevity of an *agon*. Economic problems had, in other words, little effect on contests funded by agonistic land. Therefore, several major games, where this type of funding no doubt had a large role, could survive the fourth century. The Olympics of Ephesus, for example, financed by the estate of Nysios, continued until circa 420.

[47] *Cod. Theod*. 16.10.20.1, from 415, but with reference to an earlier constitution of Gratian (375–383).
[48] For both the Constantinian confiscation and the decrees of Gratian see Bonamente 2011.
[49] Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 1, ll. 8–13. [50] *Cod. Iust*. 11.42.1.

Agonistic estates were still farmed throughout the fifth century. A law of 451 addressed a problem that caused the cities to lose money: some people occupying or cultivating land or real estate belonging to the city did not pay rents, because the possessions had been granted to them rent-free. This law distinguished between two types of possessions: civic and 'agonothetic'. The emperors decreed that all who had acquired such possessions rent-free since 379 now had to pay rent to the city.[51] A law of 491 similarly deals with the ownership of different types of land: patrimonial land, temple land, agonothetic land, and tax-free land. People who had held land of these types continuously for forty years became rightful owners and, as long as they paid the rent established for each type, they were safe from other claims. If the land was given to them rent-free, they could keep this privilege.[52] At the time of these constitutions, the agonistic circuit had collapsed, which raises the question of what is meant by 'agonothetic' land. *Agonotheticae possessiones* has been translated as "possessions, the income of

[51] *Cod. Iust.* 11.70.5: *Impp. Valentinianus et Marcianus AA. ad Palladium pp. Orientis. Si qui ex titulo donationis vel ex emptione sive ex alio quolibet titulo possessiones vel domus vel ergasteria iuris dumtaxat civilis, quae huius iuris esse vere probantur, cuiuslibet civitatis et praecipue huius aeternae urbis, cui maiorem debemus favorem, tam civilis, ut dictum est, iuris quam etiam agonotheticas possessiones a consulatu Ausonii et Olybrii dempto civili canone acceperunt, eos impositum eis canonem iuxta fidem publicorum monumentorum civitatis, ad quam eaedem res pertinuerunt, praebere iubemus. Etc.* "If any people have, by donation, by purchase or in any other way, acquired since the consulate of Ausonius and Olybrius possessions free from municipal rent, either houses or workshops, falling under civic law – which are truly proven to fall under this law –, belonging to any city or especially to this eternal city (to which we owe a greater favor), so as we have said either possessions falling under civic law or agonothetic possessions, we order them to pay the rent imposed on them according to the public records to the cities to which these possessions belong. Etc."

[52] *Cod. Iust.* 11.62.14: *Imp. Anastasius A. Matrimoniano pp. Iubemus omnes, qui in quacumque dioecesi in quacumque provincia vel quolibet saltu fundos patrimoniales vel templorum aut agonothetici seu relevatorum iugorum vel cuiuscumque iuris per quadraginta iugiter annos . . . possederunt vel postea per memoratum quadraginta annorum spatium possederint, nullam penitus super dominio memoratorum omnium fundorum vel locorum vel domorum a publico actionem vel molestiam aut quamlibet inquietudinem formidare. 1. Sed impositum canonem pro qualitate iuris, cuius praedia sunt vel loca, per singulos annos solventes, pro certo habeant suum esse quod possident vel postea possederint . . . 2. Hoc etiam adiciendo, ut illi quoque, qui dempto canone huiusmodi fundos ab initio principali iussione datos sibi fuisse confirmant, si per quadragesimos annos adempti canonis beneficium iugiter possederunt, nec canonem, cuius ademptionem quadraginta, sicut dictum est, annorum possessio testatur, possint penitus profligari, etc.* "We order that all, who in any diocese or any province or whatever forest hold patrimonial land, or temple land, or agonothetic land, or tax-free land, or land of any other legal category for 40 years continuously . . ., or will possess hereafter for the aforementioned period of 40 years, should fear no public suit, disturbance, or any other worry at all regarding the ownership of all the aforementioned land, places, or houses. 1. But if they pay each year the imposed rent at the rate fixed in the law for such estates or places, let them be certain that what they hold or will hold is their own. . . . 2. It is also to be added that those, who assert that these lands had originally been given to them free of municipal rent by imperial order, if they have held it with the benefit of this exemption from municipal rent continuously for 40 years, cannot be asked in any way to pay the rent, because, as said, the possession for 40 years confirms the exemption. Etc."

which is devoted to games," which implies that these estates were in use in the mid and late fifth century for financing all kinds of games.[53] This translation, however, is not accurate: 'agonothetic' cannot be taken as a general term used for all kinds of games, because *agonothetes* was never a normal term for a president of any type of games, but a technical term specifically for a president of a traditional *agon*. The use of a Greek term in a Latin text identifies the category as typical of the eastern Mediterranean. 'Agonothetic (*agonotheticus*) land' is therefore the precise legal term for estates of which at some point in the past the revenue was earmarked for *agones*. All the legal categories of land in these two laws represent different rental rates; these rates are linked to the historical and not to the contemporary use of the rents. Even temple land is a separate category in the 491 law, although the revenues of this type of land had not been used for the pagan cult since it was made imperial property under Gratian.

Although the wording of the above laws does not require that the rent paid for agonothetic land was still used for *agones* or other games in the fifth century, it may seem logical that the resources of agonothetic estates were diverted to other games after the circuit collapsed. At the time the *agones* disappeared, the expenses for Roman-style games were after all on the rise. One could even imagine that the appropriation of these estates for Roman-style games sped up the decline. The system of using land to fund games was certainly not limited to athletic games. In Antioch Julian exempted 3,000 plots of land from taxes, so that the revenues could instead be used by the *hippotrophoi*, the liturgists paying for horse races.[54] How these games were financed from the fifth century on, when the disappearance of city councils brought an end to the traditional organization of liturgies, remains to a large extent uncertain. Circus factions arranged the practical details and state supervision became more intensive, but cities retained a role in the financial arrangements.[55] The suggestion that agonistic land too was used for Roman-style games, however, is not at all likely. The law of 451 shows that when the athletic games stopped, the revenues of agonistic land were not automatically diverted to other public purposes: the problem addressed by this law is that the revenues were not being collected at all. The emperors now wanted to address this loss of income by obligating the

[53] Translation of *Cod. Iust.* 11.70.5 from the online *Annotated Justinian Code* by Fred H. Blume.
[54] Julian, *Misopogon* 43 (no. Budé).
[55] Cameron 1976: 218–19; Gascou 1976: 192; Roueché 1993: 9; Puk 2012: 85–95, 118–21. Cameron gives the example of Alexandria, where a quarter of the cost of circus games was contributed by the councilors. Procopius (*Historia Arcana* 26.6) claims that revenues collected by the cities for civic needs and for the games (πολιτικῶν ἢ θεωρητικῶν) were confiscated by Justinian.

lessees to pay the rent to the cities, but did not stipulate a use for it. It was probably mixed with the rents of civic lands and could serve all kinds of civic use.

The continued existence of agonistic estates after the contests linked to them came to an end is particularly interesting for understanding that end. *Agones* financed by the revenues of sufficiently large agonistic estates enjoyed a relatively stable financial situation in late antiquity; these games, in other words, did not come to an end because of a lack of resources. This explains how certain contests, especially the Antiochene Olympics, could survive the collapse of the agonistic circuit. Yet to understand why many games with less structural funding did disappear, the other types of funding need to be examined.

Agonistic cash funds could suffer from some similar problems as funds based on land: they represented attractive resources to divert in times of need. A greater problem, however, was that cash funds, normally in local silver coins, were extremely susceptible to inflation, which became a major problem in the late third and fourth centuries. While silver prices more or less doubled between 250 and 274, they increased tenfold between 275 and 301. In the fourth century they continued to rise quickly, doubling every few years.[56] If a contest established in 250 was endowed with a cash fund of which the revenues would cover about two-thirds of the expenses, to be complemented by sponsorship, by the time of the sixth celebration in 274 this same fund would cover only one-third of the expenses and sponsors would have to come up with two-thirds. Another six celebrations later, not more than 5 percent of the costs could have been paid from the revenues of the fund. Probably the contest would already have been abandoned at this point. A city could of course inject new capital into the fund, but this was not a structural solution and would only have postponed the end.

That cash funds were unstable as a means of financing was not a new problem. Many smaller contests – games funded on cash were generally not top games – cannot be followed over more than a century, as problems could always arise with investing in loans. Cash was easily embezzled, moreover, and even low inflation would eventually place a larger responsibility on the city or on sponsors. Until the late third century the stream of new foundations could easily keep up with the gradual disappearance of old games. With the hyperinflation of the late third century, however, a

[56] For the third century see Wassink 1991: 465–67; Rathbone 1996: 329–33; for the fourth century see Bagnall 1985: 61–72.

cash fund became worthless in the course of a few years.[57] Obvious cases of early demises circa 300 would have made the defects of this type of funding clear to new benefactors and discouraged them from instituting games in the same manner. Given the continuing price inflation of the fourth century new foundations in silver would have been pointless. From the reign of Constantine onward a fund in gold *solidi* would have been a more stable alternative, but perhaps this solution came too late to reintroduce this form of financing. Unfortunately, we have no information on how many games disappeared because of the inflation. As the security of the finances was an important consideration in the award of status – and cash was, even before the inflation, more risky than land – and because there are no clear signs of decline in the sacred contests until the second quarter of the fourth century, the effect must have been limited to low-status games of only local importance. We must not imagine all small-scale games wiped out, however, as some were funded by small estates.[58]

A large group of games was at least partially paid for from the civic treasuries. An illustration of how the high costs of a contest could weigh on the city finances can be found in a memorandum on expenses for the Oxyrhynchite *Kapitolia* in 317.[59] For these games 527 talents and 500 denarii were budgeted, 427 talents and 500 denarii apparently being the income from an unspecified fund (either agonistic land or civic land) and 100 talents, that is about 20 percent of the budget, to be contributed by the councilors. Of these 100, only 60 talents were available, leaving a total of 487 talents and 500 denarii, not enough for the budgeted costs. These costs were, moreover, exceeded by about 20 percent, so that 115 talents extra – at least, as there may have been other costs that were not discussed in this particular memorandum – had to be paid directly out of the city treasury.

As shown in Part I, there was no real decline of sacred games of regional importance in the late third or early fourth century. After the 330s, this seems to have changed. There is explicit evidence that in the third quarter of the fourth century financial pressure weighed on the Nemean games and on the temporarily discontinued games of Nikopolis and Carthage. Constantine and Constantius II confiscated some civic properties in order to meet the increasing expenses for the imperial administration and

[57] See Jones 1964: 732; Roueché 1993: 8.
[58] See OGIS 566 and SEG XLVII 1771 for small-scale games with local catchment area funded by the resources of designated pieces of land.
[59] P.Oxy. LXIII 4357.

army, which Julian consequently restored.[60] The extent of these confiscations is not clear, but even relatively small financial setbacks made it harder for the cities to fill the holes in the agonistic budget from money in the city treasury.[61] Valentinian I and Valens then decreed systematic confiscations: two-thirds of the income of the cities was to go to the fisc and only one-third could be used by the cities independently. Later Valens returned part of the rent on civic lands to the city treasuries.[62] Cities were only temporarily without a source of income, as they did acquire new properties, but the confiscations certainly put a strain on the civic economy.[63] This can explain the end of some *agones*. In the case of the *Kapitolia* of Oxyrhynchus the confiscation of civic property would have made it impossible for the city to contribute a sixth of the total expenses directly from the city treasury. The councilors were not able to increase their portion from their personal fortunes, as they were not even able to raise the money they were supposed to. Even the income from the fund may not have been available anymore, as this may have come from civic, and not strictly agonistic, land.

The confiscation of civic resources, the evaporation of cash funds, and the potential temporary problems of agonistic land eventually all placed on sponsors a greater responsibility for the upkeep of games. Money could be procured by a collective of councilors, as in Oxyrhynchus, by private benefactors, or by the officials of the contest. The presidency was not necessarily a heavy burden, as in some cases the *agonothetes* was merely administering the agonistic fund, but the expectation that presidents would bring something more to the table than simply covering the necessities could make the office one of the more expensive liturgies of the city. Therefore, not every member of the council was capable of performing it, and the group of potential candidates was limited. Even when the *agones* were booming, years in which candidates were plentiful and the appointed presidents tried to outdo their predecessors with their expenditure alternated with years in which candidates were hard to find and sometimes shared the presidency, as they could not bear the expenses on their own.[64]

[60] *Cod. Theod.* 10.3.1 and Ammianus Marcellinus 25.4.15 both document the restitutions by Julian. Earlier confiscations are implied by the restitution. Ammianus Marcellinus 22.11 suggests that Constantius confiscated public buildings in Alexandria.

[61] Schmidt-Hofner 2006 shows that the traditional view of global confiscations is not supported by the evidence.

[62] *Cod. Theod.* 4.13.7, 15.1.18. [63] Jones 1964: 332–37; Carrié 2005: 301–02.

[64] For several men sharing the expenses see e.g. I.Didyma 183, IK Side 134. Three inscriptions from Argos (IG IV 597, 602, and 606), on the other hand, brag that the *agonothetes* also handed out free oil in the gymnasium during the games.

The desire of some to take up the liturgy and receive honors as generous benefactors sometimes clashed with their inability to pay for the splendor they wanted to demonstrate. Already in the early Principate this led to abuses, for example when presidents promised the athletes higher prizes than they could afford, or when they paid them out in kind as they could not find enough cash, thus forcing the victors to trade their prizes before they could leave for the next contest.[65]

In late antiquity, when the just-sketched situation increased the pressure on these presidents, some candidates likewise had to be pressed to take up the presidency, whereas others took up the office with enthusiasm. Examples of the first can be found in Oxyrhynchus. The office of *agonothetes* was a point on the agenda of the city council circa 299: several candidates had been named and now one of them had to be urged to accept.[66] Again in Oxyrhynchus an assistant to the *agonothetes* was appointed to share the burden for the *Kapitolia* of 329.[67] In some cases people were forced to take up the liturgy although they could barely afford to hold games. A law of 385 addresses this problem by describing the circumstances in which a *curialis* could be forced to take up the *agonothesia*: he could be forced if his situation (presumably both his rank and financial situation) allowed it, and if he had already fulfilled all compulsory duties he owed to his city.[68] This law was addressed to the governor of the prefecture of the East, which encompassed the eastern part of the Balkans, Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt – that is the area in which the majority of the remaining contests were held. Another rescript

[65] Petzl and Schwertheim 2006: letter 1, ll. 19–28.

[66] P.Oxy. XII 1416, l. 5: π(ερὶ) τοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ὀνομασθ(έντων) εἰς ἀρχὰς ἀγωνοθέτην προτρα[πῆναι].

[67] P.Oxy. LX 4079 (and its duplicate 4080).

[68] *Cod. Theod*. 12.1.109: *Idem aaa. Cynegio praefecto praetorio. Nec cogi ad agonothesiam volumus invitos et ad eum statum cuncta referenda sunt, in quo inveniuntur. Atque ideo curiales, qui universa persolverint nihilque iam vel ex honoribus reliquum habeant, quod debere videantur, dumtaxat huius ac similium pro qualitate generis functionum, postquam patriae cuncta reddiderint quae publica poscit utilitas, etsi praesentare forsitan nolunt, tamen propter personarum condicionem praestare cogendi sunt, ut concessa sibi generaliter atque in perpetuum ex comitibus dignitate laetentur, osculum quoque his in provincia iudicantum et consessus indultus sit*. "It is our will that no persons shall be compelled to perform the office of *agonothetes* if they are unwilling and that all things must be referred to that status in which they are now found. Therefore, if any *curiales* have fully discharged all their compulsory services and have remaining no honorable duty, which they appear to owe to their municipality, to the extent only of that kind of compulsory service and similar services that were consonant with the status of their lineage, after they have paid to their municipality all the services that public welfare demands, even though they should perhaps be unwilling to present the games, nevertheless they shall be compelled to present them on account of their legal status, and they shall enjoy the rank of ex-*comes*, which is granted to them generally and in perpetuity. The right of osculation also and the right to sit in council with the judges of the provinces shall be granted to them." Translation adapted from Pharr 1952: 358. Presumably a man could, on these conditions, be forced to take up any agonotheteship in the province, not just in his own city.

informs us that, from 372 on, citizens of smaller cities in Asia could take up the alytarchy of the Olympics of Ephesus.[69] On the one hand this suggests that Ephesus at times had trouble finding a suitable candidate among its own citizens, but on the other this also attests a willingness among men from outside the provincial capital to take up the office. The imperial rescript in this case did not force anyone to become alytarch, but just created the possibility. For the Antiochene alytarchy too, eagerness is attested in Libanius' oration on the festival banquet, which was one of the traditional expenses for the president. Subsequent alytarchs used this banquet as the ultimate occasion to show off their generosity, outdoing their predecessors by inviting more guests or giving more presents.[70]

This eagerness to become contest president in a large city can be partially explained by the good structural financing of these games. Agonistic lands are well documented in Ephesus and can be assumed to have existed in Antioch.[71] The presidents of these games therefore had to spend relatively less than presidents of minor games. As the total costs of major contests were of course higher, they probably did not pay less in absolute figures. With the money spent on a magnificent banquet for several hundreds of guests, one could perhaps pay for an entire contest in a small town. The presidents of *agones* funded by agonistic lands did, however, pay a smaller portion of the total costs, while presiding over much grander games, which means that for a relatively small extra expense, they could gain far more honor.

Even at places without an agonistic fund, people occasionally still volunteered to sponsor games. At some point in the mid fourth century, the athletic contest(s) in Carthage had been abandoned. In 376, an imperial constitution permitted the restoration of an unnamed contest, because it would be paid for by voluntary sponsors.[72] As the law mentions only these

[69] IK Ephesos 43, ll. 7, 22.

[70] Libanius, *Or.* 53. Similarly *Or.* 11.135–136: "They spend lavishly on horse races and gymnastic contests, some according to their means, others more than is suitable for their means. The object which each of those engaged in the liturgies strives for is to surpass his predecessor and to make rivalry impossible for his successor, and to bring forth in fairer fashion the things which are customarily performed, while adding new features to those which have been traditional." Translation Downey 1959: 667.

[71] Malalas 9.20 and 10.27 (ed. Thurn 2000) mentions a donation in the reign of Augustus reported by the second-century historiographer Pausanias (cf. Jeffreys 1990: 178–79, 188–89, 203–05). He connects this with the *Olympia*, but this link is probably incorrect, as these were founded only in 212. Cf. Remijsen 2010a: 429–36. A new donation seems more likely.

[72] *Cod. Theod.* 15.7.3: *Imppp. Valens, Gratianus et Valentinianus AAA. ad Hesperium proconsulem Africae. Non invidemus, sed potius cohortamur amplectenda felicis populi studia, gymnici ut agonis spectacula reformentur. Verumtamen cum primates viri populi studiis ac voluptatibus grati esse cupiant, promptius permittimus, ut integra sit voluptas, quae volentium celebretur impensis.* "We do not

sponsors, there was apparently no longer an agonistic fund in the city. It is not unlikely that, for a while, this arrangement worked here: there may have been a bigger pool of candidate sponsors in Carthage than in some other provinces, as northern Africa was less touched by the economic crisis than most other regions.[73]

In general, the evidence for late-antique sponsors shows that at least a part of the elite still had the necessary resources to act as benefactor. The impact of the economic crisis of the fourth century on this form of financing should therefore not be overestimated. In the *curia* there were unhappy voices claiming that the financial pressure was onerous, but this pressure weighed most heavily on the small landowners, and not so much on the higher reaches of the elite, who could still afford extravagant expenditure. The divide between the very rich and the less rich was growing.[74] The very rich still had the money to pay for games, but of course they had to want it too, for they could, and did, also spend on other things, such as lavish private houses or on charity.[75] The willingness to sponsor games was closely related to the political ambitions of the elite, which will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

On the economic circumstances in general, we can conclude that they certainly created problems for the *agones*. The villains were the hyperinflation and the confiscation of the civic resources. Even though there is little evidence for the abandonment of games, the problems were severe enough for us to presume that at least some of them came to a swift end, in particular the *agones* that were largely funded by a cash fund (especially in the early fourth century) or by civic land that was not specifically earmarked (especially under the Valentinian confiscations). This process would have been accelerated by the domino effect described before: because all *agones* were linked to other games in regional circuits, they benefitted from each other's success as well as suffered from each other's decline. Especially for cities far away from the Mediterranean and from the circuit highlights, it was hard to independently convince competitors and visitors to come. As some contests on a regional circuit disappeared, the other cities needed to organize a more attractive event than before in order

begrudge, but rather we encourage the pleasing pursuits of a happy people, and so the spectacles of the athletic *agon* shall be restored. Moreover if the people of high rank wish to be beloved for these pursuits and amusements of the people, we gladly grant permission, in order that the pleasure may be complete, since it is furnished at the expense of those persons who are willing." Translation adapted from Pharr 1952: 433.

[73] See Lepelley 2001. [74] Brown 1971a: 34.

[75] E.g. Borg and Witschel 2001: 113–16; Bowes 2008: 4–5.

for their contests to survive, but could, as a result of the extra expenditure this required, get into a difficult financial situation as well. Other economic problems, such as temporary alternative designations of agonistic funds, years in which no sponsors could be found, or the inability of city councils to make up for deficits as a result of the earlier Constantinian confiscations, made these holes in the circuit even larger, which in turn made it harder for those cities, where the contests were envisaged as only temporarily interrupted, to get their contests renewed.

After this section on the economic factors in the decline of the contest circuit, it should be added that the end of many individual contests and of local circuits of minor games was not only caused by economic challenges, it may have had economic consequences as well. Many pagan festivals, including those with *agones*, were accompanied by fairs. Merchants were attracted by the numerous visitors, who formed a large potential clientele on top of the local population. The locals used this opportunity to buy goods that were normally not locally available. The important economic role of festivals was recognized by the Roman authorities, who granted *ateleia* to the fairs, that is the waiving of commercial taxes, as an inducement for merchants.[76] Because the agonistic circuit was organized as a number of smaller regional tours, some merchants may have followed the same route as the athletes, and in this way stimulated the circulation of goods in the region. The economic effect of the disappearance of these festivals would already have been felt in the mid fourth century. To fill this gap in the local economy, fairs were added to Christian feasts, against the will of some churchmen.[77]

The city in late antiquity

The confiscation of civic lands was part of a general tendency toward centralization in late antiquity. Because of the expansion of the imperial administration the cities lost much of their traditional authority. *Poleis* remained the building blocks of the late Roman Empire, maintaining their important administrative role in the collection of taxes, but the city council gradually lost its role as a policy-making organ, including its role as initiator of its own projects such as new local contests. This shift of power was linked to changes on the level of the province.

In the early third century the Empire was divided into about fifty provinces, each supervised by a governor who traveled between cities to

[76] De Ligt 1993: 45–48, 92. [77] De Ligt 1993: 58, 71–75; Mitchell 1993: II.69–70.

give the citizens access to the provincial court of justice and who had, due to the great size of most provinces, only a superficial control over the area. The city councils took their own decisions on projects within their own territories. The intervention of the governor was mostly limited to the cases on which he was consulted as a representative of the emperor. There was some cooperation between the cities of a province in provincial *koina*, particularly in the field of the imperial cult. Just like the city councils, the assemblies of these *koina* could decide on the organization of a contest. At the very end of the century, Diocletian redivided the Empire into about a hundred provinces. The provincial *koina* or *concilia* were adapted to this new structure. Each late-antique province, moreover, belonged to a diocese and a prefecture, the governors of which had considerable influence. The division of responsibilities between these different levels was unclear, as the administrative system did not result from a rational plan, but from a gradual development, improved by several reorganizations. It always remained "something of a patchwork."[78]

Most of the new provinces contained only three or four cities of importance and were therefore considerably easier to oversee than the old provinces. In the fourth century each of these smaller provinces had, as a result of the rapidly expanding bureaucracy, a staff of about a hundred people. This new situation enabled the governors to exert a closer and more continuous control. Instead of traveling between assize-centers, they took up a permanent residence in a provincial capital. The governors drew to themselves matters of policy, for example the more serious decisions regarding public buildings and services and the running of local courts of justice, and left the city councils only with the task of nominating magistrates. Financially, the cities became weaker too, particularly between the reigns of Constantine and Valens, because of the confiscation of civic lands and civic taxes. Some cities needed to lower their standards of living to keep the pressure on the *curiales* bearable, for example by limiting the construction of public buildings. The drain of civic resources to the state was necessary to pay for the ever-increasing imperial administration on different levels.

The gradual centralization could not but affect the agonistic circuit. The local elite in the city councils, the traditional promoters of the *agones*, could not as easily push through their will now this institution had been curtailed.

[78] Jones 1964: 377. On the centralization in general see Jones 1964: 712–66; Liebeschuetz 1987; Ward-Perkins 1998; Carrié 2005; Slootjes 2006: 16–45; Mitchell 2007: 180–81. Kelly 2004: 1 calls this shift of power a "movement from 'soft' to 'hard' government."

They were still responsible for the practical organization, in particular for appointing liturgical officials and administrating the accounts, albeit under closer control by the *curatores* or *logistai*, who in the fourth century had a larger role in the cities than before.[79] The account for the *Kapitolia* of 317 was, for example, presented to the *logistes*.[80] Major decisions with financial implications, such as the proposal for a new contest or the addition of costly new events and prizes to an existing contest, could no longer be proposed to the councils once they had lost substantial parts of their income. Although the city saw its responsibilities reduced, it did retain some role. It is significant in this respect that the early fifth-century honorary inscription honoring the sophist Ploutarchos for financing the procession of the ship during the *Panathenaia* was erected by the Athenians and was therefore an official monument of the city.[81] To get things done, however, one needed to go to the governor instead of through the council.

Already in the first century the Roman governor had a small role in the agonistic circuit. Because he exerted some financial control, he was contacted during the process of introducing a new contest. He had to confirm that the *agonothetes* would be exempted from other offices and that commercial taxes at the fair were waived.[82] He likewise had to make sure that the cities did not spend more on games than the amount fixed at the moment of institution, but he probably got involved only when something went wrong. When the games were held, an embassy was sent to the governor with an invitation. Menander Rhetor suggests that the attractions traditionally mentioned in such an invitation speech were the presence of many cities and of competitors from around the world.[83] In the fourth century texts tend to refer more explicitly to the authority of the governor. Every suggestion for a new contest or for a change in the proceedings now probably had to go through his administration. In the reign of Constantine, for example, a letter on the appointment of an assistant to the president of the Oxyrhynchite *Kapitolia*, written by a civic official to the *logistes*, refers to the authority of the governor. Because the document is incomplete, it is unfortunately unclear how exactly the appointment fell under the authority of the governor. Another document may call the same *agon* ἐπαρχικός, an adjective derived from ἔπαρχος, the Greek title for the

[79] Originally the *logistes* was a temporary imperial magistrate, but he became a permanent official appointed by the *curia*; see Carrié 2005: 295–96.

[80] P.Oxy. LXIII 4357.

[81] IG II² 3818. As with so many late-antique inscriptions, this epigram is poetic. The Athenians are described as "the people of Erechteus" (l. 1: δῆμος <Ἐ>ρεχθῆος).

[82] Wörrle 1988: 16, ll. 108–12.

[83] Menander Rhetor 424 (ed. Russell and Wilson 1981).

governor.[84] Another indication of the increased role of the governors is that Libanius wrote them rather than representatives of the city councils or the athletic synod with requests to send competitors to Antioch.

The centralization of policy diminished the atmosphere of constant competition between cities, which had been an important factor in the agonistic explosion of the second and third centuries. Games had always had an international aspect; the advice of Menander Rhetor to talk about this in an invitation speech shows that circa 300 the attraction of many foreign visitors was still considered paramount for the success of a contest. Within the new provincial structure, however, there was a clear hierarchy between cities: first the imperial capitals, then the diocesan capitals, thirdly the provincial capitals, and finally the other *poleis*. In the early third century a city such as Smyrna competed with its neighbors for primacy of the, at the time very extensive, province of Asia. In 214 Smyrna was temporarily ahead of its competitors and received the title 'first'. It proudly communicated this change by renaming the games of the Asian *koinon* held here the *prota koina Asias*.[85] After the reform of the provinces a city such as Smyrna had to resign itself to being inferior to the provincial and diocesan capital Ephesus. The drive to invest in local games to manifest itself as a successful city therefore weakened.

The provincial hierarchy was not the only impediment to new agonistic initiatives of cities competing with their neighbors. The agonistic explosion of the second and third centuries was only possible because the circuit was at the time highly structured, thanks to supervision by the court and the professional associations of the competitors, which had an excellent grasp of the circuit's strengths and weaknesses. The quality labels of 'sacred' and/or 'eiselastic' games served as instruments to streamline the civic drive for new games. As already observed, the third century witnessed a tendency to grant sacred status more easily, which lessened the value of this label. Diocletian solved the financial pressure caused by this status inflation by limiting the exemption from liturgies to the victors of at least three sacred games, one of which had to be won in Rome or Greece. With this, from an economic point of view, sound measure he effectively took away one of the structuring elements of the circuit, because he detached the long-established link between the sacred status of a contest and the privileges of the victors. Once a single victory did not suffice for privileges, sacred

[84] P.Oxy. LX 4079 (and its duplicate 4080) and P.Harr. I 97 V. The reading of the latter is not entirely certain: ἑπαρ(χικός), see Chapter 4, n. 41.

[85] TAM II 587, I.Hierapolis 15. Cf. Burrell 2004: 48–49, 351–54; Leschhorn 1998: 51.

status could hardly function as a quality label at all. It would have become unclear how cities could make their new games more attractive than existing contests and this confusion may – on top of the new procedural difficulties – have made new *agones* less attractive as civic projects.

The result of the political changes was that contests in provincial capitals had better odds of surviving than games in minor towns. With the exception of the original *Olympia* and *Pythia*, all *agones* attested with certainty after circa 370 were held in provincial capitals: Corinth, Aphrodisias, Ephesus, Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage, and Rome. The greater availability of evidence for these centers is not the only reason. Because the provincial capitals were privileged by the new organization of the Empire, the vitality of city life was preserved here longer.[86] A governor naturally felt responsible for the provision of entertainment in his capital and would make better arrangements for their funding. Hence Pseudo-Julian complains in the letter on behalf of the Argives that the Corinthians received for *venationes* money contributed by other cities in the province, while a small town such as Argos had to carry the heavy financial burden of games on its own.[87]

In the context of this tendency toward centralization one wonders why there is not more evidence for *agones* organized by *koina* in the fourth century – because, logically, these would have better odds of survival, being already provincial. The answer can probably be found in the way these games were funded. There is little evidence for this, but the different possibilities can easily be deduced. If the games were completely communal, there was either an agonistic fund to which all cities had contributed, or else the games were paid each year by a liturgist from a different city.[88] In the first case, the fund was most likely in cash – it would be difficult to contribute jointly to an agonistic estate – and the contests would have suffered under the late third-century hyperinflation. In the second case continuity was possible, though funding an entire contest was an incredible burden. In Asia, however, all cities seem to have had their own games of the *koinon*, which suggests that they were not entirely communal. Games closely linked with one city could have been endowed with agonistic land, which was more secure, but as they were not really communal the logic that they would be safer from the effects of centralization of course no longer works.

[86] E.g. Ward-Perkins 1998: 381; Liebeschuetz 2001: 12–13. [87] Julian, *Ep.* (no. Budé) 198.
[88] Herz 1997: 251–52 argues for contributions of every city for each contest.

The political ambitions of the local elite

In the fourth century the decision-making role as well as a large proportion of the financial burden of the *agones* shifted from the city as institution to individual members of the elite, in the guise of voluntary or appointed sponsors and of provincial governors. Traditionally, presiding over *agones* had been a normal stage in the political career of notables. At the turn of the fourth century it was, at least according to Menander Rhetor, still expected of a young notable that he would at some point in his career act as *agonothetes*.[89] To figure out, however, whether *agones* could still serve the ambitions of the provincial elite in the fourth and fifth centuries, and especially for whom among them, we first need to know what these men aspired to in life.

One way to study the ambitions of the elite is to look at the way in which they represented themselves. To stand out in society, the elite needed to gain some sort of social or symbolic capital. A normal way of achieving this was a *euergesia*, an act of self-promotion in the form of a benefaction (of a public building, a banquet, or games) for the community. Such an act of euergetism was successful if the community reacted by publicly honoring the benefactor, for example by awarding him an honorary inscription. Changes to the epigraphic habit reflect changes to the political culture and, therefore, potentially form a context against which the end of the *agones* can be better understood. The commemoration on stone of one's achievements reached its heyday at the turn of the second century. The choice for stone as material illustrates a wish to be honored for eternity. That honorary inscriptions became less popular in the course of the third century does not mean that citizens no longer aspired to symbolic capital or to stand out in society, but that the way they wanted to stand out changed.[90] The enjoyment of honor in the here and now seems to have become more important than the wish to be remembered eternally: private homes of the rich became more luxurious, clothing more ostentatious, and acclamations by the people were valued more highly than before.[91] The

[89] Menander Rhetor 413; 435 (ed. Russell and Wilson 1981).

[90] Zuiderhoek 2009: 154–59 also notes the effect of changing political culture on euergetism. I do not agree with him, however, that euergetism was already in decline in the third century, for the methodological reasons explained in the Introduction, n. 40. Nor do I agree with the idea that late-antique benefactions were strongly influenced by the Christian idea of charity. Charity was addressed to the poor and had no political incentives; euergetism was addressed to the community and had a political role. A late-antique donation of a building or a presidency of games was an expression of euergetism, not of charity.

[91] There is a detailed discussion of the new means of self-representation in Borg and Witschel 2001: 90–116.

local magnates who had in the early Empire paid for public buildings, now invested additionally in luxurious private town houses and great rural villas such as at Piazza Armerina.[92] All of this has been linked to the new late-antique 'mood'. Euergetism – or competitive display – was still, however, a beloved elite practice: benefactors, in particular governors, are publicly praised for their generosity and clergymen complained, without real effect, that some men would rather spend money on games than on charity.[93] Games were as a benefaction by definition temporary, as they covered only a few days, but could offer the *euergetes* a vivid experience of being honored. John Chrysostom described the cries and applause of the public for the president of the games. They called him protector and ruler and compared him with the Nile and the Ocean. After two or three days the games were over and so was the hour of glory. Still admirers of the president prayed that they themselves would attain the same before they died.[94]

Earlier honorary inscriptions for the local elite commemorated mostly achievements for the city: they listed local offices and, in the case of athletes, citizenships of different cities and were erected by the city council. By 300, inscriptions linked to the *polis* and to citizenship became practically non-existent, while provincial governors became proportionally far better represented in the epigraphic record.[95] This gradual change in the epigraphic habit from the Severi onward coincides with longer periods of imperial residence in the East and with the gradual expansion of the imperial administration. As a result of the creation of new avenues of advancement for the provincial elite in the imperial administration, the liturgical offices of the *curiales* were valued less. Doing what a liturgy required is no longer presented as a benefaction. That at a time when honorary inscriptions for locals were very rare, however, Athens still dedicated a monument to Ploutarchos for sponsoring the Panathenaic procession three times suggests a continuing appreciation for people who did something extra, above what could be expected.[96] Whereas pure euergetism was thus still highly regarded, liturgical officials no longer received copious praise. In the fourth century, many members of the provincial elite therefore reoriented their ambitions towards the imperial administration.[97]

In the early Empire the average member of the provincial elite in the East could not expect more than a career in his own city. Local offices and

[92] Bowes 2008: 4–5. [93] Brown 1971a: 43–44; Leyerle 2001: 49–50.
[94] *De inani gloria et de educandis liberis* (SC 188) 4–6.
[95] On the cities in the third century see e.g. Carrié 2005: 269–312. [96] IG II² 3818.
[97] Ward-Perkins 1998: 381; Liebeschuetz 2001: 11–19; Skinner 2013: 49–52.

priesthoods were honorable, and all that they could hope for. For those wanting a more 'international' career, there were few options. Members of the most important families could become high priests of the provincial *koinon*. An important sign of prominence within the local community was Roman citizenship. Competing on the athletic circuit was another way of extending one's horizons. Following the *Constitutio Antoniniana* every free man had Roman citizenship; noble rank (of the senatorial order, the equestrian order, or later also the *comitiva*) became the best way to distinguish oneself.[98] Such nobility was awarded by the emperor, usually on appointment to an office that required this rank. Another sign of rank (but not necessarily nobility) was the honorary *nomen* Valerius (from Diocletian on) and later Flavius (from Constantine on), which designated all (ex-)holders of high government offices, members of a governor's staff, *curatores* of the cities, and soldiers.[99] To distinguish oneself in late antiquity, in other words, one needed an office in the imperial administration. The most interesting avenues of advancement were high offices, such as governorships and ministerial posts at the court, which came with nobility. The number of these high offices was of course still relatively small, but as most governors were only in office for one or two years, a considerable number of local notables eventually got the chance. This 'fair spread' over the eligible notables was an important concern for the emperors; for this reason the Roman bureaucracy continued to appoint inexperienced amateurs instead of professional administrators in its high offices.

Positions in the administration were, moreover, interesting because the *honorati* (holders of noble rank) were exempt from curial burdens. With the drain of the richest and most influential from the *curiae* to the administration, the pressure on the remaining *curiales* increased, certainly after the confiscation of civic lands.[100] This in turn made the higher offices even more attractive. The supreme ambition of a young provincial was no longer to be a *curialis*, although that was still considered honorable and people were still proud of their home town, but to become an *honoratus* by getting a governorship or another high post in the imperial bureaucracy. Although the administration was by far the most popular career path for the local elite, the expansion and reorganization of the army had created new opportunities too. The clergy likewise recruited from the *curiales* to fill

[98] There was a complex system of ranks, which changed considerably in the fourth and early fifth centuries, when the *comitiva* and equestrian order more or less died out, but the senatorial order received new levels of nobility. See Jones 1964: 523–30.

[99] Keenan 1973, 1974.

[100] Jones 1964: 752–57.

the increasing number of episcopal seats. Higher positions in the Church did not confer a high rank, but the holders did enjoy similar exemptions from curial burdens.[101]

Agones were typically feasts of the civic community. Some late-antique examples, such as the eagerness of the Carthaginian notables for their local contest or the donation of Antiochos Chouzon – a prefect, but also a local – to the Antiochene Olympics, show that concern for the local community could still be a factor in the choice to sponsor games. For many *euergetai* from the fourth century on, however, the 'community' had changed its composition: they wanted to reach out, not only to the people with citizenship of a specific *polis*, but to all Roman citizens in the province. For those members of the elite that had the money for lavish benefactions, a donation in the provincial capital was most interesting, because it could be presented as a gift for the entire province. While the *agones* in major cities profited from this, agonistic initiatives in non-capital cities were negatively affected by the new organization of the Empire. Finding *curiales* for the liturgies on which *agones* depended for their regular organization became difficult in these cities: in order to be effective, the law of 385 which allowed compelling local notables to take up the office of *agonothetes* sweetened the deal with the promise of the rank of ex-*comes*, which meant that they would enter the ranks of nobility above provincial governors.[102] This constitution fits in with the wider imperial policy that aimed to counter the drain of people and their money from the curial order (see Chapter 9).[103] In the previous section the case of Smyrna was mentioned as no longer able to dream of becoming the first city of Asia. If a man from Smyrna or from another non-capital Asian city now wanted to make a big impression by presiding over splendid games, these would have to be those of a more important city. The appointment of non-citizens as contest-presidents was not entirely new – around AD 200, a man from Smyrna presided over the Olympics in Pisa[104] – but had thus far been exceptional. In the course of the fourth century, however, many citizens of smaller

[101] For this shift of power in general see Jones 1964: esp. 377–90 (short offices), 535–42 (privileges of the *honorati*), 737–57 (*curiales*); Ward-Perkins 1998: 376–79 (*curiales*). For the avenues of advancement see Salzman 2002: 107–37, esp. 125, 132. She studied in the first place the careers of aristocrats from the West, but the career paths she distinguishes (senatorial, bureaucratic, military, and religious) existed in the entire Empire and attracted similar people everywhere. On pp. 125–26, on the imperial bureaucracy, she also gives examples from the East. See also Harl 1987: 8, 99–100. For the clergy and particularly bishops see Lizzi Testa 2009: 527–29; 533.

[102] *Cod. Theod.* 12.1.109. For the text and translation see n. 68.

[103] Another example: *Cod. Theod.* 12.1.127.

[104] IK Smyrna 595.

Asian cities were so eager to preside over the annual amphitheater games or the Olympics in Ephesus that they had to be held back by the imperial administration until they had done enough for their home towns.[105]

Capital cities attracted even voluntary donations. Most late-antique donations came from (ex-)governors and other (ex-)officials.[106] Officials in office had access to tax money[107] and hence could offer more lavish donations while paying less from their own pockets. They had, moreover, strong political motives for benefactions: since their position was always somewhat precarious, they could not afford to be on a bad footing with the local notables, as these could support, or end their career.[108] Ex-officials no longer had access to such resources, but they were in a better position than *curiales* as they would have made money during their career and, because of their exemption, would not have lost it afterwards on some expensive liturgy. For the sponsoring of *agones* too, there was a tendency toward the greater financial involvement of high government officials. In Olympia – not a capital but a place of major symbolic value – a fourth-century governor was honored for his kindness with an inscription.[109] In Antioch, the Plethron was aggrandized in three phases, twice in the early fourth century by local notables, but circa 384 by Proklos, the *comes orientis*.[110]

Such benefactions by governors were not part of the increased official responsibilities discussed in the previous section; they mainly served individual political ambitions. Sometimes, the euergetism even verged on illegal practices. A recurring problem was that governors, in order to promote themselves as *euergetai*, started to present themselves as organizers of games they were not supposed to organize. In some cases governors even transferred games from the town where they were traditionally celebrated to the provincial capital, so that they themselves would win the glory a liturgist had paid for. Imperial measures tried to counter this domination of the governors over the games. A law from 372 tries to put an end to the transfer of games, by stipulating that games should not be under the control of the provincial administration but had to be held by the responsible official or civic priest in his own city or, if not the same, in the city

[105] IK Ephesos 43.
[106] Late-antique inscriptions usually honor governors in office, but the most important patrons of Antioch named by Libanius are primarily former imperial dignitaries, see Ward-Perkins 1998: 378.
[107] For the possible sources of money for governors acting as benefactor see Slootjes 2006: 82–84.
[108] On the role of benefactions in the relation between governors and provincials: Slootjes 2006: 92–104.
[109] IvO 481. [110] Libanius, *Or.* 10, 1; 10–13.

where the games were traditionally held.[111] The imperial rescript exhibited in Ephesus, from exactly the same year, deals with the same problem. In the preceding years the organization of the provincial assembly and of the shows performed during it had depended on the whim of the governor, but now the emperors decided that organization lay in the hands of the provincial civic priest, who was to be appointed in turn by each of the four main cities of the province.[112]

In the course of the fifth century, however, the role of the governor was acknowledged and fixed by law. A constitution from 409 put a limit to the expenditure on games in order to alleviate the pressure on the *curiales*. The men targeted by the limitations because of their "imprudent and insane craving for applause" were not the *curiales*, however, but high officials from the imperial administration.[113] The situation was that nominally governors sponsored the games, but they tried to get the money back from the *curiales* and in this way destroyed their resources. Although the attention paid to the drain of money from the *curiales* is reminiscent of earlier laws, the involvement of officials from the imperial administration in the organization of the games is now no longer questioned. Governors were not told to cede their role as organizer to the *curiales*, but only to limit their expenses.

[111] *Cod. Theod*. 15.5.1: *Imppp. Valentinianus, Valens et Gratianus AAA. ad Probum p(raefectum) p(raetorio). Magistratus et sacerdotiorum editiones, quae aut in civitatibus aut certe in his debent exigi, quas delegit antiquitas, non in potestate iudicum sint, qui plerumque, dum popularem plausum alienis spoliationibus aucupantur, ea, quae in competenti loco sollers diligentia praeparavit, ad alteram urbem transferri praecipiunt, sed in eorum arbitrio maneant, quorum expensis ac sumptibus procurandae sunt*. "The production of spectacles by magistrates and civil priests, which must be required of them either in their municipalities, or at any rate in those which antiquity has chosen, shall not be under the control of the judges; for very often while the judges strive for popular applause at the heavy expense of others, they order to be transferred to another city those spectacles which skillful diligence prepared in the proper place. But the production of spectacles shall be under the control of those persons at whose outlay and expenses they must be furnished." Translation from Pharr 1952: 432. 'Judges' is the typical term in constitutions for officials from the imperial administration, such as governors.

[112] IK Ephesos 43.

[113] *Cod. Theod*. 15.9.2: *Impp. Honorius et Theodosius aa. Anthemio praefecto Urbi. Cunctos iudices admonemus, ut ludorum quidem, quibus moris est, intersint festivitati et oblectamentis favorem eliciant populorum, verum expensarum non excedant duorum solidorum librata impendia, nec inconsulta plausorum insania curialium vires, fortunas civium, principalium domus, possesorum opes, rei publicae robur evellant: exceptis alytarchis Syriarchis agonothetis itemque Asiarchis et ceteris, quorum nomen votiva festivitatis sollemnitas dedicavit*. "We admonish all judges that they shall be present at the festivities of shows, as is the custom, and elicit the favor of the people by amusements, but their expenses shall not exceed the moderate outlay of two solidi. They shall not, through imprudent and insane craving for plaudits, destroy the resources of the *curiales*, the fortunes of citizens, the houses of the aristocrats, the riches of the landholders, the strength of the municipality. Excepted herefrom are the alytarchs, the syriarchs, the *agonothetai*, the asiarchs, and all other officials whose title depends on the votive ceremony of the festivity." Translation adapted from Pharr 1952: 435–36.

In the case of *agones* in particular the involvement of high officials continued to increase as well. In Chalcedon, it was a high imperial official, the *praefectus urbi* of Constantinople, who wanted to reintroduce the Olympics.[114] The two fifth-century *agonothetai* from Aphrodisias were both provincial governors.[115] In 448 money for the Antiochene Olympics was provided by Antiochos Chouzon, *praefectus praetorio Orientis*.[116] In 465 a law stipulated that the games of the alytarch in Syria, that is the Antiochene Olympics and the *venatio* of the syriarch, became the responsibility of, respectively, the *comes orientis* and the provincial governor. No *curialis* could take up the office, even if he wanted to.[117] If it had been created earlier, this new, more structural form of financing the games could perhaps have saved the circuit, but now it affected only a single *agon*.

[114] Callinicus, *Vita Hypatii* (SC 177) 33. [115] IAph2007 4.202; 8.273.

[116] Malalas, 14.17 (ed. Thurn 2000); PLRE II: 104.

[117] *Cod. Iust*. 1.36.1: *Imperator Leo. Titulos, qui alytarchiae et syriarchiae muneribus in prima Syria deputati sunt, per officia tam viri spectabilis comitis Orientis quam viri clarissimi rectoris provinciae flagitari praecipimus. 1. Alytarchiae quidem ludi cura viri spectabilis comitis orientis et eius officii, syriarchiae vero sollicitudine viri clarissimi moderantis provinciam eiusque apparitionis exerceantur, nullique penitus curialium, nec si voluerint, idem munus vel honorem subeundi licentia permittatur*. "We order that the titles that belong to the *munera* of the alytarchia and the syriarchia in first Syria shall be taken over by the offices of the admirable *comes Orientis* and the most brilliant governor of the province. 1. The games of the alytarchia shall be carried out under the care of the admirable *comes orientis* and his office, those of the syriarchia under the care of the most brilliant provincial governor and his staff. No one at all of the *curiales*, not even if they want to, shall be given the license to undertake this duty or honor." See Downey 1939: 182 for the interpretation.

CHAPTER 13

The agon *as spectacle*

A difficult choice

As we have seen in the previous chapters, several institutional changes were set in motion at the time of the tetrarchy. The centralization of power steered the ambitions of the elite in the direction of high government posts and the provincial capitals. There athletic contests flourished, but in the smaller cities they suffered financially. The circuses attached to the tetrarchic palaces moreover set off a passion for this new diversion that fundamentally changed the entertainment sector. The *agones* lost their dominance among the public events in the eastern Mediterranean: for the first time they had serious competition from other types of games. This final chapter aims to discover why the *agones* did not do well in this contest. In order to assess the *agones*' attractiveness in late antiquity, we will examine the extent to which the perceptions of *agones* changed once these belonged to a spectacle landscape colored by Roman fashions.

Although this chapter touches on the behavior and expectations of the entire public, the perceptions of the urban elite are once again of particular importance, not only because these are far more tangible in the evidence, but primarily because the members of this group were also in a position to take decisions on the organization of the contests. Of a young notable it was expected that at some point in his career he would preside over games.[1] As we have seen, the display culture continued to dominate among the late-antique ruling classes in the fourth and fifth centuries. The affluent man, however, was presented with a choice: which type of games would he spend his money on?

Chapter 9 suggested some reasons why circus games were usually preferred over *agones* by imperial sponsors. For one, they were held in far larger

[1] This expectation can be deduced from most of the texts on games, but Menander Rhetor 413 (ed. Russell and Wilson 1981) also mentions it explicitly: ὅτι φιλοτιμήσεται πόλεσιν, ἀγῶνας διαθήσει, κοσμήσει πανηγύρεις, καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα.

structures, in which the emperor could reach out to a far larger number of people. There was, furthermore, a long tradition in Rome of organizing circus games for imperial birthdays and for the consul's assumption of office, that is for festivals promoting the continuity and legitimacy of power. These advantages of circus games cannot be simply assumed for the provincial elite, however. In the provinces the organizers worked with different budgets, so smaller games did not necessarily represent a less attractive choice. The example of the entertainments in the imperial capital was, moreover, only one source of inspiration; local traditions broadened the scope of what could please the crowd. As recent scholarship on *agones* in the early Empire has abundantly shown, a city's traditional games too could be creatively adapted to express messages of loyalty to the Empire.[2] Nor should the importance of such ideological messages be overestimated. Mime drew on everyday themes and pantomime on ancient myths, but both forms of entertainment were very successful into the sixth century.[3] For the presidents it was not the specific message of games that mattered most, as for them games were not in the first place about seeing but about being seen.[4] As long as the public loved what it saw and would cheer the name of the president, it could serve his political aim of acquiring symbolic capital.

To understand the choices with which potential presidents were presented, we need to be able to look at games in their terms. Notables did not, in fact, choose between various kinds of 'games' when they wanted to be cheered in a public arena. It is easily overlooked that the concept of 'games', used in most modern scholarship and throughout this book as a category that includes *agones*, horse races, *venationes*, gladiatorial shows, and shows in the theater, is a modern invention: although a translation of the Latin *ludi*, it is used for a far larger number of events than the term *ludi* ever was. Though it may seem so for us, 'games' is not a self-evident category. The equivalent umbrella term in Latin, *spectacula*, had in fact a different connotation, and the Greek language for a long time did not even have a word for what we call 'games', as will be discussed below. Mental categories are never innate: which distinctions are made is culturally determined. "Discernible only through society's mental glasses, islands of meaning are invisible to anyone not wearing them," in the words of the sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel.[5] In order to understand how people in late antiquity interpreted what we categorize as 'games' and which distinctions

[2] E.g. Boatwright 2000: 95–98; Newby 2005: 1–14; Spawforth 2007; van Nijf 2012: 60–61; 70–88.
[3] Puk 2012: 233–302; Webb 2008. [4] Cf. van Nijf 2012: 65. [5] Zerubavel 1991: 81.

were meaningful to them, we need to look at *agones, venationes*, and the like through their cultural glasses. Of course, these late-antique perceptions did not originate *ex nihilo*. The imperial-age entertainment sector combined games that originated in the Greek cultural sphere with games that developed in the Roman cultural sphere. Therefore, we need to understand Greek and Roman perceptions of their own games as well as the games of the other in order to make sense of the late-antique situation.

Glorious contests and ambiguous spectacles

A striking difference between Greek and Roman traditions, which illuminates an important disparity in their perceptions of games, is the treatment by society of the participants in games. The competitors in the *agones* enjoyed, as we have seen (see Chapter 10), a comfortable position: they usually belonged to respected families from the higher layers of society, and councils granted them official privileges after a victory in a prestigious *agon*. Several of these privileges, for example the honorary monuments on the agora or the front-row seats during public events, visually underlined their high status to the entire city. These honors for victors can be linked to a deeply ingrained appreciation for being the best in the civic culture of the Greek East. Even the less successful competitors, however, who traveled on the agonistic circuit but could not boast of being the best, enjoyed a relatively high social status.

Roman law, on the other hand, put the participants of *ludi* and *munera* on a level with prostitutes, criminals, and other kinds of offenders and defined them as 'infamous'. This legal state of *infamia* denied performers the full rights associated with Roman citizenship: they were for example not protected from corporal punishment, did not have the right to lay an accusation in a public court, could not become members of city councils, and could not contract legal marriages. The *Digesta* do not contain a list of all professions affected by *infamia*. Instead, infamous performers were defined as all those who made an exhibition of themselves in front of a public and who contended or acted for gain.[6] This broad definition theoretically includes all (non-slave) entertainers: actors, dancers, gladiators, and charioteers. As the *infamia* of performers is never systematically discussed in legal texts, however, there may have been some room for flexibility. Occasional honorary inscriptions for charioteers and even actors

[6] *Dig.* 3.2.2.5. For a list of offenders branded with *infamia* see the whole of *Dig.* 3.2.

suggest that some highly successful individuals could escape this bad reputation.[7] In general, though, performing in front of a public, especially for money, was regarded as a disgraceful act.

Literary texts confirm this negative assessment of performing. Members of Roman literate circles constantly redefined themselves and their culture in opposition to the threatening differentness of, in particular, actors and dancers; because there was a zone of overlap between rhetoric and the theater, the dichotomy between 'high' and 'low' culture constantly had to be reconstructed.[8] Even actors and dancers who enjoyed celebrity status could still be held in contempt by the elite. People lower on the social ladder may have been milder in their views on performing. With regard to singers and dancers in twentieth-century Egypt, where moral discourse and interviews with members of the upper and upper-middle classes reflect perceptions very similar to those found in the elite-biased ancient sources, anthropological research has shown that respondents of the lower-middle and lower class often regarded performing as a job like any other.[9]

Common explanations of the ambivalent treatment of performers emphasize the specific socio-political role of performances: sponsoring games offered alluring possibilities for elite self-representation, but at the same time the shows represented a threat to the elite, whose authority could be challenged by the lowly members of society who performed there.[10] This socio-political challenge indeed confirmed feelings of unease among the elite regarding games and stimulated them to express their worries, but it does not explain why the performers were lowly members of society to begin with and why the elite did not use participation in games as an arena to challenge their competitors for prestige, in the same way as men of high standing did in the Greek tradition of *agones*.

The anthropologist Jack Goody has shown that the association between performers and immorality is not specific to the Roman Empire. His study of the ambivalence of representations convincingly argues that this association is in fact a cross-cultural phenomenon.[11] People of all cultures feel to a certain extent uneasy about forms of representation, even if not everyone feels this to the same extent, and even though most cultures have more

[7] Edwards 1993: 123–26; Leppin 2011: 671–72.
[8] See for example Lada-Richards 2007 on the relation between the elite and pantomime dancers.
[9] Van Nieuwkerk 1995: 106–10, 121–22. Cf. Webb 2008: 23. In order to map the status attributed to various types of performers, van Nieuwkerk worked with interview questions such as 'Would you want to see your children married to such a person' or 'Would you want to see someone in your family practice such an activity.' See her book pp. 187–92.
[10] E.g. Edwards 1993: 100; Dupont 1985: 95–98; Lada-Richards 2007: 56–61.
[11] Goody 1997: esp. 99–152; on pp. 103–04 he applies his model to Roman actors.

problems with some types of representation than with others. Whereas for example in many cultures actors and dancers are strongly affected by this uneasiness, musicians are often less touched by it. The widely felt uneasiness is caused by the shadowy relation all types of representations have with truth: because people involved in acts of representation make a living out of creating a fake reality – out of lying, to put it bluntly – they are automatically suspected of having questionable morals. Performers affected by this suspicion are thus assigned a low status, even when their art is extremely popular and when the most accomplished among them are celebrities. As a result, performers typically have an ambivalent position in society. This anthropological model can be well applied to the position of Roman performers, which was similarly ambiguous: they could be famous stars, but were at the same time suspected of an immoral lifestyle and for this reason defined as 'infamous' and limited in their rights. The stories played out in the Roman theater were of course obvious forms of representation, but the battles put on in the amphitheater between oddly armored men who were forced to fight and sometimes even to kill their own colleagues or between animals that would never meet in nature were also staged, artificial, and unreal. For chariot racing, this staged character is admittedly less obvious.

The definition of infamous performers as all those who made an exhibition of themselves in front of a public shows that, in the Roman mindset, the public nature of a show, the fact that it was aimed at creating a reaction from a spectating crowd, made it problematic. Although the happy cheers of the public were of course also the main reason to organize games, there was always the danger that the public could be affected by the immorality of what was shown. Emotional involvement in games was seen as changing the behavior of people. As Fagan has shown in an interesting new book, ancient spectators might indeed have been affected by the same psychological processes (group dynamics, affective dispositions, etc.) modern audiences experience while watching certain sport events or movies.[12] The ambivalence of Roman games thus lay in the combination of their attractiveness with their threat to the morals of the crowd.

Unlike in the Roman West, the participants in games in the Greek East did not have an ambiguous status in society. The cross-cultural feeling of unease described by Goody cannot be found associated with large-scale public events in the Greek cultural sphere, which were typically shaped in

[12] Fagan 2011. He focuses on gladiatorial combat, but his methodology could similarly be applied to other games.

the format of a contest. There was nothing fake or ambivalent about such a contest. Of course, an *agon* created specific circumstances for the competitors, that would not have developed spontaneously, and could in this respect be seen as staged, but this did not make the contest less real. The difference between a Greek-style contest and matches between gladiators, or even Roman-style horse racing, is that nobody but themselves made the athletes compete with each other. Gladiatorial matches were contrived: the organizer decided which gladiators would be performing to give the crowd the most interesting show. It was not the victorious gladiator, but the public and president who decided on the fate of the loser. The organizer of an *agon*, on the other hand, relied on free volunteers. *Agones* were thus primarily sports contests, not a form of representation. The *agon* determined the dominant notion of 'games' in the Greek cultural sphere. Of course, there were also other traditional entertainments in the eastern Mediterranean that did not take a competitive form, but these events were typically organized for a far smaller audience: they took place at private parties or formed the side entertainment of civic feasts. These smaller entertainments were not commonly put under one umbrella term with *agones*. Nor is this type of entertainment normally included under the modern term 'games'.

The difference between the eastern perception of their local games in terms of a contest and the western perception of their local games in terms of a staged show is reflected in the moral discourse on games in both cultural spheres. In the West discourse focuses in particular on the effect of the presumed immorality of the performers and performances on the audience, who, in an emotional reaction to the games, could be led to immoral behavior themselves. This potentially negative effect of games even led to an objection to attending games on the part of some thinkers such as Seneca.[13] Western Christian polemicists elaborated this idea. Both Tertullian and his imitator Novatian explicitly objected to attending spectacles in their treatises *De spectaculis*. Besides the religious line of argumentation in which they try to establish links with the pagan cult (see Chapter 8), the treatises contain a moral line explaining why the immoralities shown steered spectators away from the ideal Christian lifestyle. Tertullian describes this emotional impact on the public in very clear terms: "There is no public spectacle without violence to the spirit. For where there is pleasure, there is eagerness, which gives pleasure its flavor. Where there is eagerness, there is rivalry which gives its flavor to eagerness. Yes, and where there is rivalry, there are also madness,

[13] Seneca, *De brevitate vitae* 12.2. Cf. Mammel 2014: 606 on the Stoic position on spectacles.

bile, anger, pain . . . No one ever comes to pleasure without some feeling, no one has this feeling without some lapse."[14] This took a western frame of reference to write in the later second century.[15]

Greek moral criticisms of the *agones*, on the other hand, focus on the lifestyle (e.g. gluttony) of the athletes (see Chapter 11), not on the impact of their public appearances on the spectators. The attending of spectacles was therefore not an issue in eastern discourse. Even among early Christian authors, criticisms of the attending of *agones* were absent or relatively subtle. Origen, for example, ranked *agones* among the useless practices of humanity.[16] For him, attending *agones* was not bad, it was only pointless. There are no contemporary Greek equivalents of the treatises *On Spectacles* of Tertullian and Novatian. The second-century Greek apologists Athenagoras of Athens and Theophilus of Antioch protested only to watching gladiatorial games, because attending those meant witnessing murder.[17] Tatian, who had his formation as a Christian during an extended stay in Rome and was therefore well acquainted with mental categories disseminated there, comes closest to the western criticisms of Tertullian. He too problematizes attendance and did therefore advise Christians to treat with contempt all kinds of pagan games, including singing, acting, athletics, gladiatorial combat, and music – which he, lacking a more precise term, calls πανηγύρεις or 'festivals'. Unlike Latin authors, however, who were socialized with western perceptions alone, Tatian did not think all games equally problematic. Although athletics did not, in his eyes, lead to virtue but instead to the ambition to excel in violence and discord, it was nevertheless the lesser evil, in comparison to the murderous gladiator games (καὶ ταῦτα μέν ἐστι τῶν κακῶν τὰ ἐλάττονα).[18]

Of course, the eastern and western Mediterranean were not closed cultural realms. Long before late antiquity, the East had come into contact with the Roman tradition of games and the West with the agonistic circuit. The aspect of representation versus reality aside – a difference that probably played only at an unconscious level – *agones* and Roman games had much in common: all were exciting public events attended by a large group

[14] Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 15. Translation T. R. Glover (Loeb).

[15] Goldhill 2001: 181–84 connects this treatise by Tertullian to the intellectual discourse and theory of vision, which did have a long history in Greek philosophy. The existing intellectual discourse, which focused on the erotic work of the eye and which can be linked to the cross-cultural ambivalent feelings towards representation, may definitely have helped Tertullian formulate his feelings. His choice for problematizing the process of looking at games in particular, however, was determined by the culture in which he was socialized.

[16] *Contra Celsum* 5.42. [17] Athenagoras, *Legatio* 35; Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum* 3.15.

[18] Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 22–24, esp. 23.1.

of spectators. The association between *agones* and Roman games was therefore easily made in antiquity too. Yet this still does not mean that people in Greek and Roman cultural spheres saw the same things, or that they shared our category of 'games'. Instead, observers interpreted the foreign tradition with reference to the mental category that their own games offered.

When Romans first became aware of *agones*, the respectful treatment of the athletes naturally puzzled them. Cornelius Nepos (first century BC) was struck by the difference, observing that, while in Greece it was a great honor to be proclaimed victor in Olympia, in Rome this would be deemed unrespectable.[19] Nevertheless, the Roman authorities accepted the particular character of *agones*; under Tiberius at the latest, jurists had come to acknowledge that competitors in the *agones* were not infamous entertainers.[20] As discussed in Chapter 10, Roman emperors also confirmed the traditional privileges of the synod. Some western performers profited from the acknowledgement of the high status of agonistic competitors: the inclusion of pantomime in the *agones* helped at least some of these traditionally low-status performers to rise within society.[21] The acceptance of *agones* as a separate phenomenon also meant that the Roman authorities made a conceptual distinction between *agones* and other games, expressed in the use of a separate terminology: the Latin equivalent of ἀγών is *certamen*, whereas *ludus* denoted only circus games or theatrical shows.

The acknowledgement of a difference does not, however, mean that Romans started to see *agones* through completely Greek glasses. Although they could make a conceptual distinction, they also had an overarching category which included *agones* as well as *munera* and *ludi: spectacula*, things to be seen or 'shows'.[22] Because the act of performing for a public had negative connotations in Roman culture, people who had grown up among the elites of Western cities could not imagine participating in any type of games, not even in the *agones*. *Agones* did spread to the West, but the participants continued to come from the Greek-speaking part of the world.[23] Some Roman authors problematized even the attending of *agones*.

[19] Cornelius Nepos, *Praefatio* 5: *Magnis in laudibus tota fere fuit Graecia victorem Olympiae citari, in scaenam vero prodire ac populo esse spectaculo nemini in eisdem gentibus fuit turpitudini. Quae omnia apud nos partim infamia, partim humilia atque ab honestate remota ponuntur*.

[20] *Dig*. 3.2.4.pr. Cf. Horsmann 1994.

[21] Webb 2008: 35–39.

[22] See, for example, Suetonius, *Aug*. 43–44, on the *spectacula* organized by Augustus. He mentions actors, gladiators, *venationes*, athletic contests, a staged naval battle, and circus games.

[23] Participation of Romans was limited to some artistic events, such as rhetoric, and horse racing. See for the example of the *Kapitolia*: Caldelli 1993a: 90–92. In the Greek East, some Roman athletes are attested in the late Republic and early imperial period, that is before Greeks carried Roman names,

The first *agon* in Vienne was indeed abolished on these grounds.[24] Western Christian authors took over this idea that an *agon* was a spectacle and thus dangerous for the spectators. Indeed, the structure and title of the two treatises titled *De spectaculis* – with sections devoted to four types of games treated on the same level, namely circus races, the theater, the amphitheater, and *agones* – reflect the Roman interpretation of what *agones* were: *spectacula* or shows. This usage is also present in late-antique legal texts: the constitution directed to the African governor regarding the reintroduction of athletic contests in Carthage calls them 'the spectacles of the athletic *agon*' (*gymnici agonis spectacula*).[25] Modern scholarship tends to avoid this categorization. Exactly because of the negative connotation of 'spectacles' with immorality, the word 'games' is used mostly as an alternative that avoids the dark and violent tone of 'spectacles'. 'Games' indeed sounds more positive, as, contrary to the word 'spectacles', it describes the activity put on but de-emphasizes the public.

Unlike the West, the Greek-speaking part of the Empire does not seem to have developed an umbrella term for what we call 'games' in the first three centuries AD, not even once the population had become acquainted with large shows that were no *agones*. Πανηγύρεις, which was used as an overarching category,[26] is not a real equivalent to 'games', as the former word can also include festivals that do not involve an *agon* or a Roman-style spectacle. The normal Greek word for shows that were not *agones* was θέαι. Deriving from the verbstem meaning 'to watch', θέα is semantically the equivalent to the Latin *spectaculum*, but it cannot be translated as such, as before late antiquity it was used only for what the Romans would have called *ludi* and not for the *agones*.[27] While a word such as 'show' or θέα is again all about the reaction of the public, a word such as contest or ἀγών puts the emphasis on the competitors.

Most imperial-period references to Roman-style games in the East refer to gladiator fights, often combined with *venationes*. These spread in connection with the imperial cult from the reign of Augustus onward.[28] The *agones* offered a model for understanding this new phenomenon, for although *munera* became well-known events in major cities, people

but these Romans were typically residents of Greek cities who had adapted their self-representation to the Greek society to which they now belonged. Cf. Caldelli 1993a: 19; Zoumbaki 2014.

[24] Pliny, *Ep*. 4.22 [25] *Cod. Theod*. 15.7.3.

[26] E.g. Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 22.1; Menander Rhetor 413 (ed. Russell and Wilson 1981).

[27] Strasser 2001: 112–13.

[28] Mann 2011: 54–57, 64–67. For a graph of the proportion of agonistic festivals, gladiatorial games, and *venationes* in Asia Minor see Zuiderhoek 2009: 88.

throughout the eastern Mediterranean continued to have far more opportunities to see athletics. Because gladiators could easily be recognized as a type of athletic competitors, they were generally more respected in the East than they were in the West. Often, they were explicitly compared to athletes: some of the best gladiators received multiple citizenships after they were freed, just as athletes did after victories, and the formulas on the funerary epitaphs of gladiators were inspired by agonistic ideology. Epitaphs were not honorary inscriptions, however. Gladiators never enjoyed as high a status as athletic champions, because status is of course determined not only by the positive perception of a profession, but also by cultural capital and social background. The organizers of gladiatorial games in the East copied the concept of these events as well as the organizational procedure, including the tradition of keeping a *familia* of low-status gladiators. Unlike athletes, even the most successful gladiators did not receive offices in the cities, such as councillorships or presidencies of games.[29] After the *Constitutio Antoniniana* their greater social mobility in the East may also have been limited, as free(d) gladiators received not only Roman citizenship like everyone else, but theoretically also the legal status of *infamia*.

The late-antique *agon* as a spectacle

By the mid fourth century the distribution of games with their roots in both Greek and Roman traditions had fundamentally changed in the eastern Mediterranean. Both gladiatorial events and *agones* were in decline. *Venationes* and circus races had gained considerable popularity and mime and pantomime – which had been gaining popularity since the second century – were now far more common than the traditional types of artists who performed in agonistic contexts. The various types of games were flexibly mixed and matched and they featured mostly hired performers. Although this is essentially the western approach to the organization of games, performers with 'Greek' specialties, such as *pankration*, also easily got hired for shows in the circus or theater.

The only late-antique text of any length that closely engages with a traditional athletic contest, and so our primary source for understanding the late-antique perception of the *agon*, is Libanius' oration on the Plethron (*Or.* 10). This was the palaistra-like structure in the center of Antioch, in which the preliminary matches for the Olympic competition

[29] Robert 1940: 263; Mann 2011: 109, 156–74.

in the combat sports were held in the month preceding the games. In the beginning of the fourth century it had two rows of seats.[30] In the mid fourth century, Argyrios, an important notable of Antioch, presided over the Olympics and doubled the number of seats. Several years later, Libanius' uncle Phasganios officiated as alytarch and doubled the seats again.[31] In 383 or 384, Libanius laments that, out of a desire to please the crowd, the *comes orientis* Proklos was going to pay for even more seats. "Who will be able to endure what will happen? Who will tolerate the crowd which will burst in? Who will not think the herald is mad when he calls for silence? Who will fear the staff? Who will feel respect for the laurel crown, or even before the administration itself? They will know that if he does not make himself a slave to the spectators when they are so many, he will flee, stunned by their shouts as though by thunder, thinking it enough to save himself, and leaving to their wishes the decision concerning the athletes. The very size of the *theatron* will draw to it those who are not worthy to take part in what goes on in it."[32] According to the conservative orator, who must have been around seventy when Proklos' extension was about to overshadow his uncle's benefaction, these extra seats were changing the composition of the audience: the judges and patrons of the athletes, who had always been present, were now joined by schoolboys, unemployed day-laborers, and the like.[33] During the matches this new crowd would shout too loudly.[34] Libanius argues that with another extension, the Plethron ('the theater of Zeus') would hence harbor the same kind of atmosphere as the shows in the theater ('the theater of Dionysos').[35] At the end of the oration Libanius suggests that the licentious behavior might even lead to riots in the city: "I know how great all this will be when the Plethron surge with disorder, and when the crowd, torn according to its passions, breaks all bounds according to the right which it believes exists on both sides, supporting some and being opposed by others, and when hands are lifted everywhere and the clamor spreads over the whole city, and some go as far as to hiss. Then not a few of the old men who see these things, and have seen what things were in the past, what will they not utter in their grief at this great change, old lovers of the true Olympic festival that they are?"[36]

The central argument of this oration, namely that the so-called benefactions opened the door to licentiousness among the public, which in turn destroyed the religious character of the Olympics, represents at the same

[30] *Or.* 10.5. For the Plethron see also p. 96. [31] *Or.* 10.9–13.
[32] *Or.* 10.21–22. Translation Downey 1961: 691–92. [33] *Or.* 10.4–5. [34] *Or.* 10.8; 14–17.
[35] *Or.* 10.23. [36] *Or.* 10.36. Translation Downey 1961: 694.

time both a new and a traditional way of conceptualizing games. Libanius recognized that the more politically oriented members of the elite treated the *agon* as an opportunity to please the public. Even if Libanius tried to sell this as modern to his readers, the political potential of the spectators' cheers were exactly why sponsors had spent money on games in the preceding centuries. As a public had always been requisite at *agones*, Libanius could only talk about the changing atmosphere during the preliminary matches; his argument would not have worked for the main competition in the stadium at Daphne. The enthusiastic reactions of the public were certainly not new, but what was new is his idea that these could represent a problem. This is not a *topos* in classical Greek literature. As we have already observed, traditional moral criticisms focused on the useless skills of the athletes or on their gluttony, not on the presence of a crowd, which was taken for granted. Instead, Libanius' argumentation is reminiscent of the typically western discourse on 'spectacles'. In order to be convincing, it requires that he and his audience could think about the Olympics as a θέα, a show with a potentially negative impact on the spectators. The availability of this overarching category in the Greek cultural sphere in the later fourth century was a direct consequence of the new reality in which *agones* were no longer the dominant public event. A competitive character, therefore, could no longer function as the defining character of 'games'. Instead, the one thing that all the games had in common in the eastern Mediterranean from the fourth century onward was the presence of an audience.

Although he uses the mental category of 'spectacles', Libanius did not, however, want to give in to the new understanding of *agones* as falling under this umbrella term. In essence, he still preferred thinking about the Olympics in terms of πανηγύρεις: he uses θέατρον for the Plethron, but refers to the matches as an ἑορτή or with the proper name of the festival, τὰ Ὀλύμπια. While he argues that, as a result of the extra seats, the preliminary matches of the Olympics would become a spectacle, his point is precisely that not even this part of the Olympic contest should be treated as a spectacle, because it was a religious feast.[37]

Libanius was fighting a losing battle. More and more authors in the Greek cultural sphere used the category of 'shows' or 'spectacles' and included the *agones* in this group.[38] Unlike before, the word θέα was by

[37] *Or.* 10.6.

[38] In *De civitate dei* 2.11–13, Augustine remarks on the difference between the Greek and Roman treatment of actors, and therefore seems an exception. He discusses this, however, as a purely historical situation.

the turn of the century used as an equivalent to *spectaculum*: in a panegyric on John Chrysostom, written shortly after his death in 407, pseudo-Martyrius speaks of the θέα Ὀλυμπιακῶν ἀγώνων;[39] similarly, Palladius does not hesitate in the fifth century to describe the Antiochene Olympics as θέα τῶν ἀγωνιζομένων.[40] As in Roman discourse, and in Libanius' oration on the Plethron, the attending of 'spectacles' is seen as problematic by other late-antique authors because of their corrupting influence on the audience. The most famous passage describing the dangers of attending games is the anecdote by Augustine about how his faithful Christian friend Alypius initially refused to open his eyes to watch the gladiatorial combat to which he had been dragged, but eventually got so carried away by the sound alone that his scruples melted away so that by the end he was watching, yelling, and on fire for the fight.[41] The behavior of the spectators is now similarly discussed by late-antique Greek authors. John Chrysostom, who uses the term θέατρον for the entire range of shows (acting, horse racing, athletics, acrobats, etc.), repeatedly warns of the immorality of performers, focusing on how the stories they staged affected the morals of the public rather than on their personal lifestyle.[42] Basil of Caesarea similarly presents the noise and shouting of the crowd as a reason why potential sponsors should be disgusted by pankratiasts, mimes, or *venatores* instead of paying for them.[43]

Most late-antique passages elaborating on the impact of games on the spectators can be found in Christian treatises. Christian authors were indeed more vehement than pagans in their warnings against this immorality. In their attempts to construct a Christian identity that was in every respect distinct from what they saw as a pagan identity, Christian hardliners promoted complete abstinence from spectacles.[44] The moral line of argumentation against games already found in Tertullian remained an essential part of late-antique Christian discourse. Many of these Christian authors naturally interpreted their objections as founded in religion. John Chrysostom, for example, explicitly linked his negative feelings about spectacles to the idea expressed in Matthew 5.28 that vice is already committed by a desiring look.[45] This does not mean, however, that the broader discourse is typically

[39] Pseudo-Martyrius, *Oratio funebris in laudem Iohannis Chrysostomi* 29. The passage is translated with commentary in Jones 2012: 327–32.
[40] *Dialogus de vita Joannis Chrysostomi* (SC 341) 16.104. [41] *Confessiones* 6.8.
[42] Jacob 2010: 27; 90–91. Cf. Leyerle 2001: 43: "On the most basic level, John indicts the theater for its falsity, for pretending to be what is not."
[43] Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia in illud: Destruam horrea mea* 3 (ed. Courtonne 1935).
[44] Rebillard 2012: 9–33; Mammel 2014: 605. [45] Jacob 2010: esp. 154–70.

Christian. Christians thought about spectacles in much the same terms as their pagan contemporaries. In essence, the moral argumentation of Christian authors did not therefore differ from criticisms made by the adherents of traditional religion.[46]

In many more passages, Greek as well as Latin late-antique authors bemoan that games induced a series of undesirable and immoral situations, including drunkenness, brawls, the presence of low social classes, hooliganism, gambling, and illicit sexual behavior.[47] Usually, these are not directed specifically at *agones*, but at the circus or the theater. A few passages, however, show that the atmosphere surrounding the *agones* was considered equally bad by the clergy. Severus, the early sixth-century bishop of Antioch, is most explicit. He complains about overall disorderly behavior, including brawls and drunkenness, and the possibility of licentious contacts between males.[48] Less explicit, but also discouraging his flock from attending the Olympics because of all the bad things following from what may seem to be pleasure, was Basil of Seleucia.[49] One cannot conclude from the rarity of these passages that *agones* were considered a relatively harmless evil.[50] The circus and particularly the theater were simply a bigger problem in everyday life, as the *agones* were held only once every two or four years and were moreover on their way out. Thinking in terms of spectacles in fact precludes thinking of the *agones* as a lesser evil for the audience.

[46] For example Libanius' criticism of the disorder and licentiousness at the *agones* in *Or*. 10 and also *Or*. 53 is similar to many Christian objections. Lugaresi 2008 (e.g. 24, 53, 171–78, 187–94, 813), however, argues that the Christian stance is opposite to the pagan stance, and the uneasiness felt about the immorality of games a specifically Christian phenomenon. He makes an artificial distinction between the elitist arguments of Roman intellectuals and the complete ban of spectacles preached by Christians (ignoring that these authors also represent the literate elite, and not the entire Christian community). Romans as well as Christians perceived the atmosphere at the games as immoral and wanted to bar performers from the community, using the tools they had: *infamia* excluded performers from the Roman citizen community, while the refusal of baptism excluded them from the Christian community. On pp. 187–94 Lugaresi challenges these similarities between the Roman and the Christian exclusion of performers by drawing attention to the celebrity of actors in the Roman world. However, including popular practices on the Roman side but not on the Christian side distorts the picture. Idolization has little to do with the perception of morality, and does not change the general rule that performers, celebrities or not, were excluded from the community by the elite.

[47] For an analysis of the common arguments against games see Weismann 1972: 69–122, esp. 84–97 or the shorter summary in Puk 2012: 25–33. For more examples of moral criticisms of Christian authors and their relations with pagan criticisms see e.g. DeVoe 1987; Graffin 1987; Lugaresi 2008; Webb 2008: 197–216; Jacob 2010.

[48] Severus of Antioch, *Hom*. 91 (PO 25), 26; 95 (PO 25), 94.

[49] *Hom*. 27 (PG 85) 308–316.

[50] As e.g. Ebert 1975: 194.

The public of athletic contests

The problematization of the spectacular character of *agones* did not make them less popular. The obstinacy of the moral discourse shows above all how strong the love of games was in late antiquity. In fourth-century Rome, games were held on almost half of the days of the year.[51] In Antioch, they easily beat the church in the competition for the attention of the people.[52] For all types of late-antique games the attractions of the spectacles were in fact far more potent than the moral objections to them. The circus or the theater remained particularly popular despite frequent attacks. This suggests that, to ensure their survival, it was probably good for athletics to be like these spectacles. Thus far, 'spectacles' or 'shows' has been used only as a cognitive category. Their inclusion in this category, however, need not imply that the *agones* actually became more spectacular. Libanius did not claim that the program of the Olympics was changed in order to make them more spectacular, only that people enjoyed them too loudly as if they were a spectacle. In order to determine whether *agones* were really like other spectacles, it needs to be examined whether the late-antique show business also affected the tastes of the crowd and actual practice at public competitions.

The little evidence we have on crowd behavior at the *agones* suggests that here too the crowd was deeply emotionally engaged. As we have seen, according to Libanius, spectators in the Plethron shouted enthusiastically to express their approval or disapproval of an athlete's latest move.[53] John Chrysostom confirms, presumably with regard to the stadium at Daphne, that the manic spectators had to be kept away from the athletes by a canvas attached to poles.[54] The story of the unpopular Porphyrios, who profited from the absence of the Christian flock during the Olympics to become bishop in an almost empty church building, shows that, like other games, the Olympics could be serious competition for the Church.[55] These indications all come from Antioch, however, which is clearly not the most representative example for the decline of the *agones*. The disappearance of other *agones* suggests that some notables did not believe them to be the best choice for receiving a proper amount of applause.

[51] According to the calendar of 354 *ludi* were held on 177 days of the year. See Salzman 1990: 119–20.
[52] This is a common complaint of John Chrysostom. References in Hartney 2004: 47–50; Lugaresi 2008: 726–28.
[53] *Or.* 10, esp. 14, 22, 36. [54] *Hom. 2 in Genesim* (PG 54) 587.
[55] Palladius, *Dialogus de vita Joannis Chrysostomi* (SC 341) 16.102.

There is arguably one major difference between late-antique spectators and the public of the imperial period: in particular the wealthier members in the audience started to watch the contests from a different perspective. The appreciation of athletic events required a minimum of technical knowledge, since each sport had its own rules. To follow the *pentathlon*, for example, it helped to know the order of the events to be able to calculate who was winning before this was proclaimed or to recognize successful throwing techniques. In admiring champions in the combat sports too, their technical level was a factor for those who could recognize it. After the disappearance of the ephebate in the early fourth century, however, fewer people would have had the necessary technical knowledge to understand what was going on or to appreciate accomplishments on the technical level. This is why *pammachon*, a less technical combat sport, could grow in popularity in exactly this period.[56]

Closely connected to the diminishing technical knowledge is the problem of identification. Until the early fourth century the better-off section of the public watching an *agon* could imagine themselves competing instead of the athlete. If they had just had a bit more talent or had listened better to their childhood trainers, it could have been them in the stadium. This identification can help to explain the traditional dominance of *agones* in the entertainment sector of the East. But many late-antique spectators of athletic games in the East had never practiced these sports, certainly none as technical as the *pentathlon*, and could therefore less easily imagine themselves competing than could their second- or early third-century predecessors. In the appreciation of spectacles, the pure enjoyment of watching thus became more important than the personal familiarity with the contest.

Celebrations of glory and indulgence in defeat

The most obvious change in the field of public athletic matches was their popularity outside the *agones*. There were of course precedents for the inclusion of athletics in the Roman-style games, and 'unagonistic' matches had likewise long existed in the East, but the new organization of the eastern entertainment sector enabled them to become far better established. These athletic shows outside the context of *agones* fitted unambiguously into the framework of the 'show': the organizer could hire athletes for exactly those matches which he thought would please the crowd.

[56] Remijsen 2010b.

The only certain depictions of such matches, found on the Kovacs vase (Fig. 5a–c), show the loser being humiliated.[57] One victor steps triumphantly on his defeated opponent. Another victor throws his opponent like a sack of flour; the caption warns the loser not to cry. In another scene an athlete who is about to be punched is shown in the hunched pose of someone who is afraid of the pain to come. The caption calls him *cinede* ("sissy"). The depicted brutality does not warrant the conclusion that this type of combat was more dangerous than the traditional combat matches. Greek combat sports had always been dangerous. Heavy athletes had long been known for their scars.[58] Images of boxing matches in the context of *agones*, for example on the Capsa mosaic (Fig. 6), regularly show blood streaming from noses or ears. Yet blood is not normally shown as a sign of weakness. It is all but clear which of the two boxers would win the match on the Capsa mosaic. Instead, the blood underlines the determination or self-control of the athlete. On the Kovacs vase, on the other hand, the losers are depicted as scared and effeminate cry-babies, abused by the victor. The image thus allows the viewer to indulge in the defeat.

The only mosaic reminiscent of this iconography is a scene with two boxers found at baths in Thuburbo Maius, of the third to fifth century AD. It is hard to date with greater precision, as its execution is too simple to make any stylistic comparison convincing. Nor was it established during the excavations when the mosaic was laid out, but a late date is definitely possible, as the baths were used into the fifth century. In this scene one of the opponents is again clearly identified as the weaker: while the right-hand figure stands upright and has his arms stretched out in a boxing movement, the pitiable left-hand athlete squats and does not even shield his bleeding face with his arms (Fig. 7).[59]

Visual homages to athletes on other mosaics do not share this theatrical touch. Instead, one can see a shift in emphasis in the opposite direction. The fourth-century fashion for depicting career athletes in a frame by themselves completely obliterates the loser. The most popular style for depicting agonistic victors became the bust (Fig. 2).[60] Although framed busts are a common feature on mosaics, for athletes in particular depicting them only from the shoulders up seems to be an odd choice at first glance: the format does not allow reference to their specialty or showing them in action; they can be recognized as athletes only because of their nude and

[57] Klose and Klein 2013. See also the discussion on pp. 148ff.
[58] For a good illustration see *Anthologia Palatina* XI 5; 81 and 258, epigrams mocking the battered look of certain athletes.
[59] Bohne 2011: K94. [60] Bohne 2011: K1, K23, K51, K55, K56, K61, K85b, and K100.

Figure 7 Mosaic from Thuburbo Maior with two boxers (third–fifth centuries).

muscular shoulders and distinctive hairstyle (the *cirrus*). Unlike depictions of actual contests or even full-figure renderings of athletes – both still attested in the early fourth century – these framed busts make a complete abstraction of the physical activity of the athletes. Until the later third century, the fame and honor of champion athletes was expressed by monuments in the city center, but as the epigraphic and statuary habit changed, other means of expression had to be found to separate the honorable victor from the mere performer. With a bust, honor is automatically implied and the idea of performance avoided. The career athlete is thus reduced to his status as a victor.

The difference between the traditional matches of the *agones* and the matches at the circus is probably comparable to the distinction between judo and professional wrestling ('catch'), as eloquently described by Roland Barthes:[61]

[61] Barthes 1957: *passim*.

> Ainsi la fonction du catcheur, ce n'est pas de gagner, c'est d'accomplir exactement les gestes qu'on attend de lui. . . . Dans le judo, un homme à terre y est à peine, il roule sur lui-même, il se dérobe, il esquive la défaite, ou, si elle est évidente, il sort immédiatement du jeu; dans le catch, un homme à terre y est exagérément, emplissant jusqu'au bout la vue des spectateurs, du spectacle intolérable de son impuissance. . . . La mollesse des grands corps blancs qui s'écroulent à terre d'une pièce ou s'effondrent dans les cordes en battant des bras, l'inertie des catcheurs massifs réfléchis pitoyablement par toutes les surfaces élastique du Ring, rien ne peut signifier plus clairement et plus passionnément l'abaissement exemplaire du vaincu. . . . Au catch, contrairement au judo, la Défaite n'est pas un signe conventionnel, abandonné dès qu'il est acquis ; elle n'est pas une issue, mais bien au contraire une durée, une exposition, elle reprend les anciens mythes de la Souffrance en de l'Humiliation publique . . .

Traditional agonistics was, like judo, solely about the competition and the victor – defeat is erased from view. In professional wrestling, but also in the scenes on the Kovacs vase, violent defeat is as central to the event as the victory. The opponents make the most of defeat, underlining it with theatrical gestures. One could imagine that the scene on the vase in which the loser remains flat on the ground, in order to give the victor the opportunity to triumphantly put his foot on his stretched-out body, or the other in which the weaker athlete allows the stronger to grab him by his neck and buttocks and throw him, represents a situation in the contest that was to a certain extent staged, as in modern professional wrestling. The athlete performers in these contests were after all not members of the elite, who had consciously to safeguard their reputation. As discussed in Chapter 10, the opponents were probably not strangers to one another: they often cooperated in athletic troupes. Because both opponents were paid wages, they were far more likely to cater to the expectations of the crowd, even to manipulate the match, instead of strictly following the rules of sport. The 'overacting' of athlete performers was not necessarily perceived as over-the-top, as it could help to make the contest more understandable to the rapidly increasing section of the public that did not know the rules.

According to Barthes, role-playing is a common feature in professional wrestling to achieve an impression of justification. "Mais ce que le catch est surtout chargé de mimer, c'est un concept purement moral: la Justice."[62] The figure characterized as a fat unmasculine 'pig' is bound to lose. Social psychology has shown that violence is indeed more easily perceived as justified when the victim is regarded as a 'lesser' person. Such prejudices

[62] Barthes 1957: 17.

not only allow for an emotional distance when seeing people suffer, it can even give license to revel in it. As Fagan has pointed out in connection to the low-status gladiators, here too a sense of hierarchy was a factor in the public's indulgence in the violence.[63] In the same way as gladiators, athlete performers were assigned a low status. Even before western perceptions spread to the East, athlete performers were not as highly regarded as their colleagues on the agonistic circuit. In late antiquity, however, these athletes not only worked side by side with people who were burdened by *infamia*, but must also have been implicated by *infamia* as well, as the law exempted only athletes competing in *certamina*.[64]

The conservative reflex of the career athletes

Though included among the spectacles in moral discourse and in imperial legislation, *agones* do not perfectly fit the model of the spectacle. As has already been argued in Chapter 8, because the proper name of, for example, the *Olympia* denoted the contest as well as the feast, it was conceptually difficult in the case of *agones* to separate the games from the whole. This is exactly why Libanius has problems with the treatment of even the preliminary matches as a spectacle. The organizational structure of the *agones*, moreover, did not allow for the same amount of flexibility. An agonistic estate provided for celebrations on a biennial or quadrennial rhythm only. Moving them from the intended date made it harder to attract the career athletes traveling on the circuit. Many of these problems could have been avoided if the presidents of *agones* had started to hire cheaper athlete performers rather than inviting career athletes. This would have made it far easier to adapt the *agones* to the changed expectations of the crowd. The presidents of games moved in the same circles as the career athletes, however. With their individual social networks and with the international xystic synod (see Chapter 10), the career athletes had an effective lobby, whereas the athlete performers did not.

At the end of the third century the inclusion at some *agones* of the less technical combat sport *pammachon* still suggested openness to changes in popular taste. In the fourth century, however, the career athletes seem to have used their pull in elite society to close off the circuit. By all possible means, they wanted to avoid association with their poorer colleagues in the circus. The distance between the two groups is not only expressed in their

[63] Fagan 2011: 155–88. [64] *Dig.* 3.2.4.pr.; 3.2.2.5.

different depictions on mosaic floors; they succeeded in actually excluding the athlete performers from the *agones*.

Traditionally, slave status or a lack of Greek citizenship were the only grounds for exclusion from *agones*. When the herald called the participants, the public was apparently allowed to bring charges against any competitor if they thought he did not qualify.[65] The exclusion of slaves was too natural for Greek authors to discuss, so known situations in which the right to enter was contested focus on Greekness.[66] As Roman citizens counted as Greeks, this criterion became meaningless from the third century on. Nevertheless, late-antique authors are more explicit regarding the exclusivity of the *agones* and show an increased sensitivity to class in the agonistic circuit.

Themistius suggests that before receiving permission to compete in Olympia, an athlete had to prove that he "sprang from an undefiled root" by identifying his father and mother.[67] The notion of being undefiled (ἀκέραιος) is a moral condition, but the idea of springing from a root (ἡ ῥίζα τῆς βλάστης) connects this with social class. Because the lowest classes could not afford to have the same moral standards as the upper classes, they were thought to live immoral lives. Themistius gives an historical example for this social and moral criterion, namely that Aristotle vouched for Philammon, Olympic boxing champion of 360 BC, by adopting him. This inclusion in a good family lifted the suspicion of immorality. Though the protagonists in this anecdote had lived seven centuries earlier, the idea that moral behavior and social class were a condition for participation was new.[68]

[65] The best evidence for the exclusion of slaves is Artemidorus, *Onirocriticon* 1.62. If a slave dreams of winning a crown at an athletic contest, this means according to Artemidorus that he will be freed, because only a free man is able to do such things. According to John Chrysostom in *Hom. 1 in principium actorum* (PG 51) 76 and *In sanctum Ignatium martyrem* (PG 50) 587, in the *agon* of religion everyone competed, men and women, free people and slaves, people from every age and class, but in the athletic *agon*, only free men were allowed; a herald asked the public if anyone had a charge to bring against any of the competitors and only those who could remove the suspicion of being a slave could compete.

[66] The Macedonian king Alexander I had to trace his descent back to Argos (Herodotus 5.22). The Boeotian champion Kleitomachos thought that his Egyptian opponent had no right to compete at Olympia (Polybius 27.9).

[67] *Or*. 21, 249c–d.

[68] In 1929, Pierre de Coubertin told in a lecture on the ancient games: "A competitor in the Games had to be of pure race, and not to have committed any crime, impiety, or sacrilege" (Coubertin 2000: 565). The same idea can be found in older academic studies, which imply that the Olympic oath contained clauses about good moral behavior. The paraphrase of this oath by Pausanias (5.24.9–10) deals only with the required respect for the Olympic rules during the festival and was in particular directed at bribery. It did not concern general behavior. For a recent discussion of the oath see Crowther 2008.

John Cassian is more explicit on the rules for admission to the games, in a long passage that elaborates an agonistic metaphor of Paul's. According to John Cassian, three aspects of a candidate's life were carefully examined: firstly that no aspect of his life was defiled by *infamia*; secondly that he was not under the ignoble yoke of slavery; and thirdly that he had proved his technique and strength. The second and third conditions were long-established: slaves were never allowed and, at all major games, athletes were required to take part in qualification contests in the month prior to the games. Cassian also stresses that athletes had to start competing as boys, and, before competing as an adult in the top games, should have proved to be at least equal to the other athletes. Preferably they should have beaten them at other games.[69] Obviously, athlete performers could not present such a track record. In a similar long metaphor, pseudo-Martyrius describes as senseless and injust the potential situation in which traditional athletes, after having trained together during the preparation period prescribed in the Olympic rules, would have to face a savage strongman.[70]

Cassian's first and specifically late-antique condition that athletes could not be infamous was directed against athlete performers. The reasoning of the Roman jurists was turned around so it could function as a ground for exclusion: while the law saw *infamia* as a consequence of performing, but not of competing on the agonistic circuit, Cassian presented freedom from *infamia* as a precondition for being allowed to compete. In the same way as Themistius' remarks, this passage shows that the elite involved in the *agones* made sure they remained exclusive upper-class happenings. In order to save their own group, career athletes had to be clearly separated from lower-class athletes.

To the career athletes, retaining the elite character of the career path of a competitor by making it even more exclusive than it was before would have seemed the only way to save the *agones*: for who would choose this career if it meant having lower-class connections and being suspected of an immoral lifestyle? For sure, none of their own group would. In the longer term, however, this conservative reflex had the opposite effect. The new spectacle landscape was a fact and the refusal to adapt to this made *agones* increasingly anachronistic.

[69] John Cassian, *Instituta* (SC 109) 5.12. Cf. Koch 2007b.

[70] Pseudo-Martyrius, *Oratio funebris in laudem Iohannis Chrysostomi* 29–30. For this passage, see Jones 2012, who discusses it in connection to the passage of John Cassian.

Conclusions to Part II

The stakeholders of the agonistic circuit

Although in histories of antiquity or of sports a Theodosian ban on the Olympics is ubiquitous as explanation for the disappearance of athletic contests at the turn of the fifth century, this theory can no longer convince. The original cultic elements of the contests had largely been removed in the course of the fourth century: bloody sacrifices ceased and the link with the temple was cut, where possible, under the influence of a religiously-mixed and tolerant elite. Those devout Christians who nevertheless still believed the *agones* to be pagan feasts represented a minority, for whom it became ever harder to explain why exactly they thought the games to be pagan (see Chapter 8).

The removal of overtly pagan elements followed from and at the same time also supported the imperial encouragement for the organization of *agones* and other games, which had considerable political value. The role of late-antique emperors on the agonistic circuit was – like that of their predecessors – mostly reactive: they rarely took the initiative, but instead reviewed requests from the cities and the international synods, who explained to them the problems of the agonistic circuit and proposed solutions. Often the emperors granted their requests, as the wealthy stakeholders of the *agones* generally had more influence on imperial policy than did the few fundamentalist Christians who opposed them (see Chapter 9).

In order to understand why the *agones* disappeared despite this imperial policy of support, the final four chapters of this book have analyzed what changed for the stakeholders: the athletes competing on the circuit and the people actively engaged in the organization of the competitions. These two interlinked groups belonged to the lay, male, and urban elite in the cities of the eastern and, to a lesser extent, central Mediterranean. They originally represented a broad group including not only rich and famous families of the Empire, but all families who were fortunate enough to have options in

life: men who could choose to send their children to athletic trainers, to spend their own free time in the palaistra, to travel to games in other provinces, to pay for membership of the athletic synod, to write to their acquaintances abroad in order to negotiate with local champions, to make proposals in the city council for the organization of *agones*, to spend extra money on a liturgy they had been appointed to or even to volunteer for the presidency of games. Throughout the fourth and fifth centuries the number of people that actually made these choices shrank, both as a result of institutional changes and because some of them started to look differently at practicing athletics and at public athletic contests. Once the elite drive to promote and participate in athletics had evaporated, no imperial policy could have saved the *agones*.

The circuit in late antiquity: a sputtering machine

This book has aimed to show that, in order to understand why the *agones* disappeared, it is essential to know the intricate mechanics of their organization. The imperial-age circuit of hundreds of *agones* formed a complex but well-oiled machine, in which every contest served as a gear that depended on other contests for its success. The design of this machine had been perfected in the course of the first and early second centuries under the auspices of the imperial court, which was kept well-informed by the shrewd engineers of the international synods of athletes and performing artists. The whole apparatus was fueled, moreover, by the competitive drive of the urban elite.

In the course of the third century AD this machine became overheated: with the constant addition of new high-status games, sometimes without structural funding, the circuit expanded beyond its limits. By the time of the tetrarchy, the problems had become evident: hyperinflation threatened the survival of those games that were funded primarily by a cash fund (see Chapter 12); the privileges (e.g. exemption from taxes and public duties) for the innumerable sacred victors moreover strained the cities and annoyed in particular the paying members of the synods, who had lobbied for these exclusive rights and now had to share them with athletes who were not devoted to a professional career in the same way as themselves (see Chapter 10). The mechanism was, in other words, in dire need of adaptation. Circa 300 the limitation of privileges to triple victors of sacred contests who had won at least once in Greece or Rome solved the immediate problems: it lifted some of the strain from the cities, confirmed the

exclusivity of the international champions and their synods, and devalued many of the sacred games in the provinces. In the long run, however, the political reforms of the tetrarchy constituted the beginning of the end. The now-constant imperial presence in the East and the gradual centralization of power, which started with Diocletian's revision of the provincial borders, weakened the civic drive, the fuel on which the agonistic engine was running.

When the higher administration moved from merely supervising to taking the lead in the political and financial decisions regarding public contests, the long-established procedures for the institution and (re)organization of *agones* became more cumbersome. Increased government control of the city finances, combined with some instances of confiscations, likewise represented a serious problem for those *agones* for which the agonistic fund was not clearly earmarked. On top of that, the traditional competition between the cities slowed down: smaller cities lost the motivation to outdo neighboring cities with the splendor of their buildings, games, and titles because, in each province, one city was now clearly designated as provincial capital and attracted most resources. The political culture was, in other words, changing. The wealthiest and best-connected men among the elite tended to receive high posts in the provincial and imperial administration; they still wanted to outdo their peers in the presentation of splendid games, for example during their governorship or when volunteering for the liturgy of president of games at another point in their career, but they now preferred to invest in the major *agones* in major cities, or in Roman-style spectacles. Small landowners, on the other hand, felt burdened by the local liturgies. In this context, the local circuits collapsed; the elite ambitions of the fourth century could put in motion only the major gears of the mechanism (see Chapter 12).

Another innovation of the tetrarchic period was the construction in the eastern part of the Empire of several palace complexes incorporating circuses. Circus games were not just horse races: a range of different entertainments were presented in between the races and on days when there were no races. The spread of circuses in the East therefore set off a fashion for shows: large-scale public events with various types of performers hired for the occasion, and designed to please a crowd. In this way, new possibilities were created for lower-class athletes who did not have the means to travel around the Mediterranean independently or to receive the support of the international athletic association, membership of which did not come cheap (see Chapter 10).

With the spread of the new shows came the expectation that *agones* were the same kind of event (see Chapter 13). To a certain extent they were indeed similar: watching athletic contests could be quite exciting and these positive emotions were precisely what the ambitious presidents wanted. Yet the *agones* never fit the model completely. The format of the *agon* – and the design of the agonistic circuit – was becoming outdated: because the date was fixed (by tradition, by an agonistic fund that would only produce the necessary budget every two or four years, and by the schedule of the circuit, which determined the whereabouts of most career athletes) *agones* were not as flexible as other spectacles. The imperial policy of supporting *agones* did not give them an edge over other games, as it did not offer any structural solutions to their specific problems. This lack of flexibility in this period of change caused a downward spiral, even for those *agones* for which an agonistic estate secured the necessary budget indefinitely, and thus also brought the major gears of the mechanism to a halt.

A small group of obstinate athletes

The late-antique changes affecting traditional athletic practices were not only institutional; changing interpretations of these practices were at least as important in the creation of the downward spiral. The late-antique popularity of Roman-style shows does indeed signal not only new ways of organizing games, but also a new cognitive category. Although long established in the Roman West, among Christians as well as pagans, the concept of 'shows' (*spectacula*, θέαι) as an overarching category of all kinds of games was new in the fourth-century eastern Mediterranean. The definition of games as 'shows' or 'spectacles' implies a shift of focus from the performances or contests themselves to the people watching it, that is to their positive and politically valuable emotions as well as to the immoral behavior to which these strong emotions might lead. By the second half of the fourth century, an increasing part of society took it for granted that *agones* ranked among the 'shows': Greek authors – most vehement among them the Christian writers – tried to expose the dangers of watching any type of games; the authorities too lumped together different types of games in certain new laws, thus defining the festive atmosphere and spectacularity of the *agones* as their main features; members of the elite in the East increasingly preferred to sponsor Roman-style games because they offered a better guarantee of a spectacle; and many of the spectators, no longer having personal technical knowledge of athletics, looked at the matches

from an outsider perspective instead of as potential competitors (see Chapter 13).

The growing lack of personal athletic experience was linked to changing perceptions of athletics as an elite activity. Perceptions of athletics shared by and disseminated among the urban elite had already started changing very gradually in the third century, which saw the rise of culturally acceptable alternatives to the long-established idealization of the athletic body. In this period, athletic training lost its role as a logical path to the virtue of self-control, in particular because of the rising admiration for ascetic lifestyles. The athletic path had long been promoted by institutions such as the gymnasium and the ephebate. By the fourth century, traditional palaistras were no longer considered necessary in the baths: they were either redesigned or left out. The ephebate disappeared as the normal program for physical citizen-education. Christianization, though hardly the only factor in the rise of asceticism, definitely stimulated the popularity of these alternative lifestyles; it also promoted – with varying success – humility over the personal ambition to be the best. There is no concrete evidence that athletics came to be perceived negatively in the eastern Mediterranean in the third or fourth centuries as a result of these alternatives – the absence of lively societal debate on the acceptability of athletics as a pastime in fact suggests that it was indeed not seen as a major problem – but the positive associations between athletics and specific virtues had become less dominant in the late-antique mindset (see Chapter 11).

In the Introduction of this book, decline was defined as a situation characterized by an inability or even unwillingness to adapt to changing historical circumstances. As has been shown in Part II, the circumstances of the fourth- and early fifth-century *agones* were quite different from those in the second or third centuries: city life was organized according to new patterns, and new categories and associations had entered late-antique minds. Until the middle of the fourth century, people involved in the *agones* tried to adapt them to the new circumstances brought about by late-antique culture: several athletic contests introduced *pammachon*, a less technical – and probably more spectacular – version of the Greek combat sports; some athletes happily accepted the opportunity to compete in the circus; and, as observed before, overtly pagan elements were removed from athletic celebrations.

As long as regional circuits of smaller-scale *agones* existed, there were paths to move between the agonistic circuit and the new opportunities in the circus. The disappearance of local *agones*, however, exacerbated the rift between the relatively well-to-do career athletes competing on the agonistic

circuit and the athlete performers in the Roman-style games (see Chapter 10). In the later fourth century, athlete performers continued to adapt to the new reality: they started cooperating, first in troupes, and in the course of the fifth or sixth century also in the circus factions, in order to meet the now-dominant standards of spectacularity. The stance of the career athletes, on the other hand, stiffened.

The late-antique career athletes formed an exclusive group, who could afford private training and were well acquainted with traditional *paideia* (but were not so spiritually inclined that they were strongly affected by reigning ideas on the vanity of physical training). Because these athletes were well connected with the Roman authorities, via their personal networks among high society and, until circa 430, via the xystic synod, they retained their traditional privileges and their exclusion from *infamia*, the limitation of civic rights affecting all kinds of performers. The circle of the late-antique career athletes was not willing, in order to meet the new expectations, to make *agones* into flexible spectacles by hiring athlete performers, but, on the contrary, actively tried to preserve the exclusive character of their own group. With the exclusion from the *agones* of people who were defined as 'infamous' by the Roman law, they even burned the last remaining bridge to the athlete performers (see Chapters 11 and 13).

Because the surviving *agones* were few in the early fifth century and were separated by vast distances, competing once again became a very expensive hobby, just as it had been in the early phases of Greek history. Thus it remained throughout the fifth century. By the second half of this century the Olympics of Antioch seem to have been left as the only regular public meeting of these amateur athletes, not only because this city was well connected to major routes of traveling and was one of the largest urban centers (with, therefore, a larger traditional athletic scene), but in particular because the responsibility of organizing this *agon* had been clearly and legally fixed in a time of decreasing curial enthusiasm (see Chapter 12). For the well-to-do participants, athletic training and competing was still an acceptable way of performing traditional culture, as it had been in the days of the so-called Second Sophistic, even if it was understood in this way only by the highly educated. Only by the sixth century does the more negative association between athletics and indecency seem to have become widespread, and Greek athletics to have disappeared even as a conservative pastime. Yet even this did not mean the end of athletic events across the Mediterranean: the far more flexible athlete performers offered exciting shows for as long as the circus games existed. Their end, however, is another story.

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